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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

UN-MANAGING LEISURE: ISSUES IN AGING AND IN SERVICE PROVISION IN INNER-CITY EDMONTON

BY
© LISA MORRIS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN RECREATION

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND LEISURE STUDIES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the faculty of graduate studies and research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Un-Managing Leisure: Issues In Aging And In Service Provision In Inner-City Edmonton, submitted by Lisa Morris in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. D. J. Whitson

Dr. S. A. Mohsen

Dr. M. A. Hall

Date: Friday, June 22, 1990

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those individuals whose lives and experiences are portrayed in the following pages.

ABSTRACT

The literature on recreation and aging often fails to address issues and concerns of those elderly who are poor or who live non-normative lifestyles. This study is an ethnographic portrait of elderly poor which seeks to illuminate their social world, explore service provision models and examine theory related to leisure, social structures and aging. Data for this project was primarily collected through participant observation. An Edmonton inner-city drop-in centre was utilized as a base for meeting and developing relationships with older adults who live in the area. Informed by critical sociology, this thesis examines the social forces which impact on the process of aging for those whose lives are no longer structured by distinctions between work and non-work, yet have neither the resources nor the inclination to participate in conventional recreation programming. This study concludes with a discussion of appropriate service approaches and directions for further research.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Topic and Main Goals

This thesis is an ethnographic portrait of elderly poor living in Edmonton's inner-city. It highlights and brings into focus their recreation patterns, their daily struggles, their ways and means of getting by, their relationships with one another and what they think about themselves and their lives. The purpose of this thesis is actually twofold. The first purpose is to illuminate the life circumstances and leisure experiences of a group of elderly people outside of the middle-class context. While the research literature in recreation and in the sociology of aging abounds with studies of retirement and patterns of leisure involvement among older people, the studies tend to assume that all retired individuals have the required financial resources to engage in leisure pursuits of their choosing. There is little mention of, or research on, those retired people who have very low incomes or variant lifestyles. While there have been a small number of ethnographies that have focused on the elderly living in inner-cities, no research study (with the exception of one page in Stephen's (1976) Loners, Losers and Lovers) has dealt with experiences of leisure among those that live in the inner-city. Research into the leisure behaviours, patterns and lifestyles of inner-city elderly is extremely sparse. There is, on the other hand, a great deal of research data and information on the recreation patterns of mainstream elderly, namely middle-class and upper-class elderly, who have been easily reached through affiliation with senior centres, retirement villages, educational institutes or golden age clubs. The works of Atchley (1971) Jacobs (1974) and Osgood (1982) are but a few examples of the research data that exist on the leisure patterns of middle-class elderly. However, most of this literature is contextually irrelevant, since the primary aim of this research project is to explore the experiences of leisure among a group of very low-income elderly. It is hoped that this project will at least make a start at filling in the wide gap that currently exists. The second purpose of this research is to explore service approaches to this population, with specific emphasis on the development and provision of social and recreational opportunities for inner-city elderly. It is hoped that this thesis will not only increase awareness about a population rarely studied, but also contribute to theory about leisure, social structures and aging and to the development of appropriate institutional and service approaches to the elderly.

The elderly who reside in the inner core of large urban cities in Canada and the United States have been referred to by other researchers as "the invisible elderly" (Ehrlich, 1976), "the unseen elderly" (Eckert, 1980) and "the forgotten pioneers" (Larocque, et al, 1988). What all three of these labels have in common is the suggestion that, as a society, we lack an awareness of the lives of the elderly that inhabit our inner-cities and even fail to recognize their presence in our midst. The impetus for this research project on inner-city elderly stems from my belief that not only are the life circumstances of this population in need of illumination, but an exploration of the habits and processes that serve to maintain our ignorance of them is also crucial.

As Galper (1980) points out, a necessary prerequisite for any researcher who is investigating social issues is an understanding of the situation and its inter-relationships to broader societal structures. People who live in slum hotels and substandard housing within the inner-city are devalued by a society that places a premium on material success and wealth. While many programs and services do exist to provide aid to those that live in the inner-city, often these are merely bandaid solutions. What to do about the plight of people who inhabit our inner-cities, and how much we as a society are willing to pay, not so much in money, but in changes to our economic and social structures, remain un-answered questions (Miller, 1982).

1.2 The Elderly In Edmonton's Inner-City

Edmonton's inner-city neighbourhood is located to the east and north of the downtown business area. It is an area of the city that contains high rates of poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, mental illness and homelessness. The inner-city is densely populated with a heterogeneous but aging population. While the elderly make up 14.7% of Edmonton's total population, persons over the age of 55 comprise 23% of the inner-city population (Larocque, et al, 1988). The inner-city currently has a very high concentration of older adults, approximately 7,000 people. Research indicates that even as far back as 1974 concern was expressed that a "golden" ghetto was developing in Edmonton's inner-city area (Co-West Associates, 1974).

Poverty is endemic among the elderly that live in the inner-city. Less than 1% of the elderly population receives a private pension; the rest are dependent on government income security programs (Larocque,1988:31). Even for those individuals who are on government support, over one-half receive less than seven hundred dollars a month and therefore exist far below the poverty line (Larocque, 1988:31). Elderly men are more likely to live in the inner-city than elderly women. In Edmonton's inner-city, the ratio of elderly women to men is about one to eight (Holmgren, 1987:15). Older women are more likely to live with family members or to reside in nursing homes than to live in the inner-city. Some men in Edmonton's inner-city have lived there for most of their lives and do not want to move, even though they may ~~have~~ health problems which make it dangerous to live alone, especially in substandard housing. Unlike the middle-class elderly population (most of whom are married), the majority of inner-city elderly are either divorced, separated or were never married.

Both men and women who live in the inner-city highly value their independence and the autonomy that the environment offers them."All I want is a room of my own, where I can close the door, whether I'm in it or not " (Field notes: Jack, May 11, 89). Many older individuals who live in the inner-city express fear of ending up in a nursing home or, worse yet, in the psychiatric ward of a hospital. Institutionalization is viewed with great fear by elderly people who live in the inner-city. Institutionalization results in separation from a community and way of life which affords them the freedom to make choices and live independently. According to Holmgren (1987), elderly people "choose" to live in the inner-city for three main reasons. First, housing in the urban core is typically cheaper than in other areas of the city. Second, the inner-city is central to services for individuals who must rely on their feet for transportation. Third, the inner-city is more tolerant of alternative lifestyles. The inner-city typically encompasses a wider range of behaviours than is permissible in middle-class contexts (Eckert, 1980). For example, a person who is an alcoholic, mentally ill or simply eccentric often finds greater acceptance in an inner-city neighbourhood than they do in a suburban, middle-class neighbourhood.

1.3 Research Design

The main purpose of this research project was to explore the social world of inner-city elderly, with particular emphasis on their perceptions of leisure, attitudes towards leisure, leisure experiences and behaviours. I was also interested in exploring the type(s) of social interaction and relationships that exist among the inner-city elderly. In this project, I used a qualitative approach as the most appropriate methodology for achieving a greater understanding of their experiences and of their relationships to each other and to service organizations.

> Any theoretical approach that is not extremely sensitive to the categories of meanings that actors employ in defining their world and deciding their courses of action is a gross distortion of human behaviour (Irwin, 1987:42).

This research project was a case study of a private, social-service agency geared to serving the elderly residents of Edmonton's inner-city. One of the goals of this case study was to highlight the social dynamics and political forces that, in part, shape the life circumstances of elderly in the inner-city. As I stated in my introduction, what led me to the study of inner-city elderly was a desire to shed some light on a rather unknown and rarely heard from group of individuals, as well as to discover why it is that we know or care so little about them.

The agency I chose to study is Operation Friendship. I chose this organization for two main reasons. First, it afforded me a location in which to observe and meet with inner-city elderly: approximately 150 people come by the drop-in centre daily for an afternoon meal and to socialize. Second, the agency's philosophy is strongly grounded in the self-help orientation (a helping response that is explored in detail in section 2.3) as opposed to control or rehabilitation. As their information package states:

> We believe seniors have the right to choose their own lifestyle and the responsibility to become as independent as possible. Our objective is not to rehabilitate, but rather to rejuvenate those positive and healthy aspects of an individual which may have become clouded over due to societal attitudes and individual social and physical problems (Operation Friendship, 1988:7).

The primary method that I used to collect data for my case study was participant observation. This involves the researcher taking "... a particular role within a culture in order to examine first hand a social situation from the participant(s) point of view" (Burgess, 1987:98). One of the goals of my participant observation was to see the world as the subjects conceive it to be. This was made possible only through prolonged and often intense social interaction.

I assumed the role of a volunteer in order to establish rapport with the elderly who are involved with Operation Friendship. Larocque, who conducted a survey of the users of Operation Friendship in 1988, found that the formal, structured survey approach posed several problems.

> Interviewing our clientele was not easy. Many of them are illiterate, a good number are confused due to mental illness and more than a few are not particularly trusting of a social worker or researcher asking them a host of personal questions (Larocque, 1988:15).

My intention was not so much to analyze the people that I met, as it was to ask them to collaborate with me in my research and thus contribute to my awareness (and possibly their own) and understanding of their social world. As Kuhn (1986) writes in her article entitled "Learning by Living," "For too long, we old people have been studied as objects of scholastic inquiry, like mice in a laboratory. It's time for gerontologists to study 'with' us" (1986:360). Since I ended up telling people I was writing a book, which made more sense than telling them I was writing a thesis, many people became concerned that I get the facts right and include in my book what they thought was important to be included.

Some of the broad research questions that I pursued included: "What is life in the inner-city like?"; "What do you value most about your lifestyle?"; "What are the injustices you have experienced living in the inner- city?"; "What does 'being old' in our society feel like for you?"; "What kinds of leisure experiences are available to you?"; "Have your experiences of leisure changed over your lifetime?"; "What kinds of relationships do you have with others who live in the inner-city?"; "What types of activities do you share in with others in your neighbourhood?"

I volunteered at Operation Friendship for two days a week from May to August and one-half day per week from September to December. While I collected most of my data over the summer months, I wanted to ensure continued contact with the agency and with the seniors, so that both groups would have an opportunity to provide me with feedback on my descriptions and analysis of their world.

1.4 The Context Of The Study

While the focus of this research project is on a particular group of elderly living in a particular geographical area of Edmonton's inner-city, emphasis will also be given to understanding the creation and maintenance of inequities in inner-city neighbourhoods. As Hall (1981:132) states:

> The inner-city proves a useful starting point for researchers, but over-concentration on it will run the risk of missing the main point, which is this: inner-city areas can best be understood as phenomena resulting from underlying forces in the economy and society.

In this thesis, literature will be explored within the context of three broad subject areas; Aging As A Social Process, The Phenomenon of The Inner-

City and Service Approaches To The Elderly. Aging As A Social Process takes a critical look at the golden-years myth of aging and focuses instead on the diversity (and often inequities) of the experience of aging, particularly among elderly who have few resources. In addition, this section also explores the concept of rolelessness as it relates to the elderly in our society, how it is created and sustained. The section on The Inner-City combines graphic accounts of the physical and social setting with a discussion of the systemic forces that produce these phenomena. Service Approaches To The Elderly explores charity, professionalism and self-help as responses to both the context of the inner-city and the individuals who live there. Data from this research project will be primarily presented in chapters four and five, which discuss in more detail the social process of aging and the political/economic structures of the inner-city respectively. Chapter six, which is essentially the analysis, serves to connect these two subject areas and provide further discussion of their significance and intricate relationship. Chapter seven concludes with a summary of the findings, a discussion of the research process and suggestions for areas of further inquiry.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Aging As A Social Process

The biological process of aging is inescapable and universal for all of us. However it is the social process of aging that shapes our later life, the kinds of experiences we have (or don't have) and our resources for coping with aging. We all get old - it's inevitable. But how we get old and what it is like to be old in our society varies for each individual. The individual experience of aging is mediated by class, gender, sometimes race and educational levels. For example, as this thesis will illustrate, being a member of a lower socio-economic class influences not only the process of aging, but also one's social, economic, health and psychological status.

"People grow up and old, not in laboratories, but in a matrix of groups, networks, institutions and communities" (Huber, 1988:346). For instance, social class position is central to the process of aging because it is central to life in general. One's social class affects early socialization and the development of values, attitudes and lifestyle. Life-course patterns are ultimately affected by the social, cultural and environmental forces and influences to which people are exposed. What then are the implications for equality of opportunity among aging people of differing gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status? Ultimately relative power/powerlessness in society becomes the focal point for investigation in order to answer this question.

-Theories Of Aging

Although lip service may occasionally be paid to the dynamic relationship of social structures and processes to the quality of human lives, research studies and academic analyses rarely consider this relationship in any depth. All too often, both lives and structures are treated as static (Hess, 1988:17). Failure to account for the interplay of social forces and life-course patterns has resulted in literature on aging that is simplistic, complacent, assumes homogeneous experiences and most significantly leads to misperceptions and stereotypical notions of aging as the "golden years". Old age is not always golden, although it may be for some individuals. For most, the process of growing older is mediated by other factors beyond chronological aging and individual choices.

In the last twenty to thirty years, much of the gerontological research has been driven by the prevailing assumptions of the activity (one seeks to remain active as one ages) and dis-engagement (one progressively begins to withdraw from society as one ages) theories of aging (Evers-Cool, 1987). Research problems constructed by these two theories focused on what was interpreted to be the singular issue common to all older people: the maintenance or release of social roles. Although these two theories of aging are quite distinct (almost antithetical), they each have had their share of criticism on both methodological and empirical grounds (Cohen, 1987; Foner, 1986; Gubrium, 1973; Hess, 1988; & Kuhn, 1977).

The activity theory as a sociological approach to aging owes its roots to Cavan, Burgess & Havigurst, the authors of Personal Adjustment In Old Age, first published in 1949. In this book, aging is conceived primarily as problematic in that it brings with it role changes. This is particularly evident in North American societies, where work/authority roles are rarely maintained through old age. The activity theory is predominantly concerned with how the aging individual reacts, both behaviourally and psychologically, to later life-cycle changes and role losses. For example, the process of retirement involves the loss of the role of worker, as well as the loss of any social network connected to that work role. "The main premise of the activity theory is that in the event that no well-delineated, socially meaningful role is available to substitute for a previously meaningful one, the aging individual becomes mal-adjusted" (Foner, 1986:4). The answer to becoming re-adjusted lies in the creation of publicly valued roles for the aged in our society. Although activity theorists have never been explicit as to the type of roles to be created, the assumption has always been that the roles should be instrumental or work-like. "Successful adjustment, as the activity theorists portray it, is a lifestyle that is visibly 'busy', in which one pursues leisure or a-vocational hobbies such as woodworking or gardening" (Gubrium, 1973:8). Neugarten (1961), who embraces the activity theory, advocates that older persons continue to be involved in work similar to that of their adult working life. For example, she suggests that a retired farmer take up gardening as a hobby. The activity theorists maintain that being occupied in work-like activities, the old person is then viewed as a fully operational individual able to command respect from others, which leads to increased self-esteem and life satisfaction. The implication of the activity theory is that old people who adjust to aging by actively substituting lost roles with new ones are going to be content and satisfied individuals.

One of the major theoretical faults found with the activity theory hinges on the implicit assumption it makes about the relationship between people's desires and their abilities or resources to meet those desires (Foner, 1986 & Hess, 1988). "Individuals who seek to cultivate a successful pattern of activities in their middle adult years, experience a higher satisfaction with their lives in later years" (Havighurst, 1960:14). The activity theory is clearly rooted in middle-class experience and in the liberal assumption that autonomous individuals can make rational choices. This liberal assumption that "personal happiness is a legitimate goal and that it can be sought and developed by all individuals is misleading" (Marchak,1988:25). This viewpoint does not account for the fact that opportunities to choose one's path in life and to determine one's future (as in retirement planning) are not equally available to all individuals. The activity theory operates from the liberal assumption when it suggests that the key to successful aging lies with the individual and his or her choice to become actively involved in making the best of their retirement years. How accurate is this theory for older adults who lack the knowledge of roles available to them or the economic resources to engage in them? If anything, it would appear that endorsing the activity theory would be akin to blaming the victim, since the theory does not take into consideration that many elderly people face constraints which inhibit their ability or motivation to secure experiences or resources that will improve their retirement years.

A second weakness of the activity theory can be found in empirical evidence which serves to contradict its major proposition. Research has indicated that low levels of activity among older adults have been found to be associated with high levels of morale and life satisfaction (Gubrium, 1973 & 1979): clearly not everyone needs to keep busy in order to be happy. A third weakness of the activity theory is related to the implication that activity of a work like or instrumental nature may be successfully substituted for roles, relationships and activities that once provided satisfaction. This hypothesis proposes that filling one's life with busy, work like activities can be an adequate substitute for former roles one engaged in, such as working or parenting.

> The intimacy of having a spouse (or partner) is not replaceable by active involvement in gardening, woodwork or other crafts. It is more likely that developing a close and personal confidant whom one trusts and encounters frequently is the the type of relationship which revives and sustains former life satisfaction and this without any overtly active involvements (Gubrium, 1973:16).

The disengagement theory emerged in the 1960's as a direct challenge to the activity theory. Functionalist arguments are constructed in such a way that all behavioural patterns in a system of social interaction are viewed and analyzed in terms of the equilibrium needs of the system of which they are a part (Gubrium, 1973). What this implies is that individual variations of behaviour tend to be dissolved into a pre-conceived pattern of systemic adjustment. Functionalists view persons as parts of social systems, rather than as individuals with needs of their own, which may differ from those of social systems. The needs of the system tend to dictate the actions of individuals, resulting in behaviours that are normative or socially prescribed. Functional behaviours are those that serve to maintain equilibrium in any given social system, while deviant behaviours are seen as dysfunctional in that they upset the equilibrium of the system.

Since the disengagement theory is grounded in the functional approach, the starting point of the theory is that disengagement is an essential and functional feature of social life in later years.

> Disengagement refers to an inevitable mutual withdrawal resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to. The process may be initiated by the individual or by others in the situation. His withdrawal may be accompanied from the outset by an increased preoccupation with himself; certain institutions in society may make his withdrawal easy for him. When the aging process is complete, the equilibrium which existed in middle life between the individual and society has given way to a new equilibrium characterized by a greater distance and an altered type of relationship (Cumming & Henry, 1961:14-15).

There appears then to be two sides to the disengagement theory, the social and the personal. The aging process requires the older person to gracefully withdraw from social life. Likewise, social systems withdraw from the aged. Since these two aspects of the theory are seen by disengagement theorists as inevitable and functional for our society, they are, in fact, considered as one.

The most significant flaw in the disengagement theory is the assumption that withdrawal is a mutual process.

> The disengagement theory postulates that society withdraws from the aging person to the same extent as that person withdraws from society. This is, of course, just another way of saying that the process is normatively governed and in a sense agreed upon by all concerned (Cumming & Henry, 1961:384).

If it is true that there are strong normative pressures (as argued by the functionalists) exerted on older individuals to withdraw from society, it remains questionable whether the individual actively pursues disengagement or rather is moved in that particular direction. For example, in North American society, we are all familiar with phrases like, "Mr. Jones had to be put in a nursing home," or "Mrs. Smith must be placed in a nursing home for her own good." As the remainder of this thesis will attempt to demonstrate, many older people in our society undoubtedly feel powerless, and, while they may prefer to be more visible in our society, it is structured in such a way that invisibility seems their only option.

When the norm of disengagement is found in the act of personal withdrawal, the norm is said to be operative. The relationship between individuals and behaviour expectations is such that individuals act so as to carry out normatively prescribed conduct. A person is not viewed as ultimately free to act in a manner different from that which is normatively defined. Conversely, if disengagement does not occur as one ages, the norm is said to be inoperative. In fact, Cumming & Henry (1961:199), themselves, cite documented cases of engagement well into old age. However they do not believe these cases weaken their theory, since they state that individuals' tempermants play a role in whether they choose to disengage from society. Yet, at the same time, they also state that the process of disengagement is a structural one literally devoid of personal choice or will. It would appear, then, that disengagement theory is an empirical argument which is tautological (Gubrium, 1973:27). Not only does the theory fail to explain variations (from full disengagement to full engagement) in aging adequately, it also seems to harbour invincible empirical contradictions and loop holes. Perhaps the most significant problem with the disengagement theory is that "Disengagement theory by itself offers little means by which variations in engagement with different roles in later life can be explained" (Maddox, 1970:25).

Both the activity theory and the disengagement theory have been the center of debate in recent years. At the center of this debate are the assumptions each one makes regarding the process of aging, one emphasizing agents (but in a simplistic way) and the other emphasizing system needs. More generally, it is questionable whether either theory adequately accounts for the wide variation in the aging process among individuals. In relation to this, both theories consistently disregard the aspect of personal resources and institutional constraints. The main criticism of both these theories, then, is that neither fully addresses the broader social picture in relation to the process of aging.

As long as theories remain unquestioned, newer or revised theories cannot evolve. As Gubrium (1973) explains, any theoretical approach to the study of aging is to some degree a criticism of other approaches. The major criticisms of both the activity theory and the disengagement theory motivated the development of the socio-environmental or socio-cultural theory of the aging process. The socio-environmental theory sought to fill in the gaps created by the activity and disengagement theories. Although it has some affinity with its two predecessors, it is unique in that it considers both the individual's resources and environmental constraints. The socio-environmental theory can be seen as both a blending and refinement of the two previous theories. From the activity theory, the concept of activeness is borrowed, yet it is viewed in degrees and also placed within the context of the individual's life, his or her needs and social circumstances. Likewise behaviour norms are incorporated from the disengagement theory, yet they are fully recognized for their constraining characteristics rather than seen as prescriptive factors in the process of aging.

The socio-environmental theory of aging seeks to dismantle the golden-years myth, which conceives of aging as mainly a function of chronology and leaves little room for differences in style of aging that are contingent on a variety of social and individual factors. The popular images of the golden-years myth may be summarized as follows: (Gubrium, 1973:200).

1. The social environment of old people is conceived as stable and undemanding.

One of the best examples for this image can be found in the advertisements for retirement communities. They are touted as trouble-free, a place to make friends, a safe haven, a perpetual vacation spot and, above all else, available to all older adults. In reality, these communities are within the financial accessibility of only a small number of older individuals. In addition to this limiting factor, as Jacob's (1974) ethnographic work of a retirement community points out, few older adults really desire to live in or thrive very well in an environment where there is little diversity and virtually no challenges.

2. The ideal social relationship is portrayed in an image of the mutually enriching elderly couple.

The opportunity to enjoy one another's company in the sunset years is a popular image associated with retirement. The richness of the later years seems only possible for those individuals who are fortunate enough to retain their spouses. However due to the fact that many women traditionally married men several years their senior, they find themselves either widowed or caring for an infirm spouse. The exclusivity of this image also results in the never-married (or even the divorced or separated) older adult being seen as a deviant and not capable of living a life with meaningful social connection with their peers. This image ignores the fact that many single individuals, widowers and widows (in particular) can and do lead rich and satisfied lives through the creation and maintenance of valued friendships with one another (Blau, 1961).

3. Older persons are considered highly altruistic, especially in intergenerational relationships.

Older people are often portrayed as living for their children and their life satisfaction is considered to stem directly from their involvement with their children and grandchildren. The reality of relationships between older adults and their adult children (and their families) is usually much more complicated than this.

4. Aging is a process of diminishing needs and desires.

All persons, regardless of age, have a variety of needs that must be met in order to survive. Typically, needs are viewed from a lifespan perspective. For example, the need for education, employment, transportation etc. are seen to increase as one enters early adulthood and continue to remain central through out middle age; however they are expected to decline as one enters old age. In old age, persons are said to have fewer of these needs. Two main problems with this image are that it ignores that many of these needs may remain salient for older persons, and that a new set of needs may emerge as one ages, such as home support services, specialized transportation or increased social support.

5. Good health is considered to be an outcome of voluntarily being spry and living a healthy life.

The belief that good health can be obtained through individual effort can be easily refuted by those in good health who suddenly become ill, even though they took good care of themselves. Furthermore, taking good care of oneself involves both monetary and informational resources which may not be available to all.

6. Life satisfaction is a general and normal response to aging, being a result of persons adjusting themselves to old age.

When older people accept and commit themselves to the status quo and appear happy with this acceptance, they are considered to have adjusted to old age. Life satisfaction is believed to follow adjustment. This particular view of life satisfaction does not question the desirability of social conditions, but rather concerns itself with the adaptation or adjustment of individuals to existing conditions.

In totality, these images represent not only the myth of the golden years (stereotypical views about aging), but also serve as convenient images for ignoring the social forces that affect the process of aging, and for realizing the immense differences that exist among individuals and situations. Social forces have a great impact on how one ages, and economics, in particular, affects how long one can expect to live. For example, if you are in the lowest income group in Canada, you can expect to live 6.3 fewer years if you are a man and 2.8 fewer years if you are a woman (Statistics Canada, 1985). Poverty is not a fact of life, nor is it necessarily the fault of the individual; it is an outcome of specific economic and political decisions. Society needs to accept that poverty is a social problem, not an individual one, and to recognize that it structures the lives of many older individuals. This is most true for people who have been poor all their lives. It is also true, albeit to a lesser degree, for many others who have been wage earners throughout their lives but have not been able to save much and/or have worked at jobs that do not provide adequate pensions. It is finally true for many women who are separated or widowed, and whose time out of the labour force turns out to mean that their own pensions are very meagre.

-The Relationship Of Aging, Class and Leisure

Since this research project attempts to uncover the meaning(s) of leisure for inner-city elderly and provide descriptions of their leisure experiences, a discussion of the relationship of class, aging and leisure is warranted. "To be without access to or opportunity for leisure, is to be poor" (Dawson, 1988:230). The condition of poverty affects every facet of life, including opportunities for work and play. Play or leisure as it is referred to in our society must be considered within economic, political and social contexts. Biologically speaking, culture refers to the medium in which something grows. Clearly, then, the experience of leisure in our culture and one's capacities for leisure are products of one's location within the social structures of class and gender. "The importance of leisure in the lives of individuals and the way in which people use their leisure time in a particular culture often depends on circumstances which are external to the individual and family" (Bridge & Gold, 1989:11). Although leisure is often linked to personal freedom, there are economic and social forces that deny personal control in leisure. Individuals who are poor not only have less disposable income, but also have often led lives in which they have had few opportunities to develop cultural skills or even physical activity skills. Therefore many typical leisure experiences are beyond their repertoire.

As Clarke & Critcher (1985:9) point out, the "Price of Pleasure" in our society is high and shows signs of steadily increasing. This attitude is perpetuated by the media which presents images of people spending increasingly large sums of money in the pursuit of leisure. What this means is that there is bound to exist profound differences between the leisure experiences of the privileged and those of the poor. We are constantly reminded by the media that there is plenty of fun to be had and we are urged to get off the couch and take part (Tomlinson, 1986). This message, however, is deceptive. Not all individuals have the same level of resources to engage in certain activities or experiences. The message of limitless possibilities for leisure does not easily translate into reality for individuals with no money in their pockets. Leisure as a commodity is most readily available to those with steady and well paying jobs. For the elderly in our society, most of whom live on fixed incomes, their choices for leisure are often limited. As Sax (1980) indicates, we are not as free to choose our leisure as we are led to believe we are. Particularly in reference to leisure experiences outside of the home, such as dining out, attending the opera or playing golf, there is a price to be paid. Clearly, possibilities for leisure pursuits vary with income.

The activity theory, which was discussed in the previous section, is often used as a rationale for recreation among the aged. It is fairly common for the elderly to hear such panaceas as "get involved", or "keep busy", as effective solutions to loneliness or isolation in later years. This prescription of busyness typically does not refer to intense social relationships, but rather to craft and hobby-like activities. Being active means one is not idle, a condition which is often criticized in our fast-paced society. Statements such as "life is what you make it" and "you're only as young as you feel" seem to perpetuate the myth that all you need is self-motivation to get involved. Even academic (and I use this term loosely) literature has been known to perpetuate this same myth, "Leisure is no longer the exclusive right of the upper class....Age, gender, race, occupation, education or income are no longer barriers to leisure, although these factors still influence the number, type and quality of leisure experiences of a given individual" (McPherson, 1983:407). However, having leisure in one's life is not as easy as it sounds. Studies have shown that older adults who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to less involved in their communities and have fewer hobbies (Gubrium,1973, Stephens, 1976, Gold, 1989 & Crawford, 1989). Seniors who lack the necessary resources find it extremely difficult to discover or become involved in activities that may interest them, especially if their previous lifestyles and lack of economic resources denied them access to leisure opportunities and opportunities for personal growth.

2.2 Inner-city Research

-The Inner-city and Its Broader Context:

As pointed out in the introduction of this thesis, it would be a mistake to talk about the inner-city without attempting to uncover the forces or roots that sustain its existence. As Hall suggests "The so-called inner-city problem is not one, but several problems" (Hall, 1981:1). While the inner-city as a cultural phenomenon has its own distinctive attributes, nearly all of them can be traced to mechanisms or processes of our larger society in general. For example, unlike suburban areas where the housing stock consists mainly of well kept single family homes, housing in the inner-city tends to be both dilapidated and cramped as in rooming houses and single-resident occupancy hotels. This is the result of both market or economic forces and little or no legislation or policy development on the part of the government to ensure either quality or quantity of housing stock in the inner-city. In Edmonton, plans are currently under way to build a market shopping square which would eliminate over two-hundred rooms, many of which are inhabited by elderly people. The city, at this time, does not require that the developer make provisions for those that will be uprooted. Similarily, there is little green space in inner-city neighbourhoods compared to those neighbourhoods that exist outside of the downtown core. Again, this particular physical attribute of the inner-city can be traced to the profitable economic development of office buildings and cement parking lots in the downtown core.

Many researchers who have looked at the inner-city have found it necessary, if not critical, to consider their findings within a broader societal context in order to understand more fully the nature of forces that shape the inner-city. For example, Whyte's sociological classic: Street Corner Society brings to light the connection between the gangs he observed on the street and the prominent political orientations of the people who live in the neighbourhood. Likewise, Urban Villagers links the culture of urban residents to the threat of urban re-development. As a final example, Siegal (1978) explores the single-resident occupancy hotel as an alternative to total institutional responses to caring for the poor and mentally ill.

In Edmonton's inner-city alone, there are several spatial, political and historical pressures which affect living conditions for those who reside in this neighbourhood. They include the re-development or expansion of the business core, the expansion of rapid transit and roadways, inflation and increased living costs as well as social-service budget restraints (Co-West, 1977:74). The repercussions of these pressures can be seen in poor housing stock and accommodation shortages, greater demand for services such as food banks and shelters, depersonalization of many services due to the sheer number of people seeking aid and, most significantly, increased alienation of inner-city people.

-Exploring The Social World Of The Inner-City

The social world of individuals who inhabit inner cities has been well documented by sociologists such as Whyte (1943), Liebow (1967), Siegal (1978) and Unruh (1983). The findings of these ethnographies are very similar, although they span a space of forty years. The main discovery of all four studies is well illustrated in the following quote from Siegal's Outposts Of The Forgotten:

> The inner-city world is in no sense a social world, a set of group relationships through which the person's wishes are realized. The inner-city is a place of anonymous relationships....it is a world of atomized individuals, of spiritual nomads. One knows no one and is known by no one (Siegal, 1978:5).

Ethnographic works specifically of inner-city elderly paint a descriptive, yet somewhat contradictory picture of the social world of this population. Ward (1979), Eckert (1980) and Hochschild (1973) provide accounts that support the view that social ties, relationships and friendships based on reciprocity, mutual aid and looking out for one another all exist in varying degrees and intensity. Ward's (1979) research experiences in several skid-row neighborhoods in Canada and the United States indicate that items such as tobacco, food and reading material were frequently shared among individuals. Such practices of social bonding were found particularly among elderly women and between women and men in the inner-city, more so than among elderly men. Hochschild (1973:87) found examples of relationships similar to natural sibling bonds in her study of a low-income housing project in the downtown core of an American city: "For many of the women I studied, the weakening of family ties resulted in individuals taking on responsibilities towards one another." A major influence which may account for the strong sibling bonds which Hochschild uncovered, may be the fact that most of the respondents were women, in particular, widowed women who had developed strong bonds with one another.

Other researchers, however, have indicated that life for the elderly in the inner-city is marked by extreme degrees of isolation and impersonality. In her study of a single-resident occupancy hotel in the inner-city, Stephens (1976) found little group cohesiveness among the residents; in fact, the majority of the people she met appeared to be loners. Ehrlich (1976:126), likewise found "....a pattern of consistent non-involvement....even among people who had lived in the same building for years". Stephens (1976:27) found a pattern of minimal, utilitarian-based relational ties among the elderly residents of an inner-city hotel. Close ties or intimate relationships existed as rarities. "It is a world of strangers who come and go, who live in close physical quarters but erect strong barriers to social and psychological closeness. It is a world where reliance or intimacy rarely occur".

Stephens (1976) concluded that most of the people she met were loners in the truest sense of the word. Many no longer had ties with family or former friends, and, due to their own suspiciousness and fear of exploitation, did little to replenish what appeared, at least in her eyes, to be an impoverished social network. They rarely visited each other in their rooms, preferring to be left alone. The relationships that she observed were mainly instrumental with their primary function being the attainment of goods and services. Stephens (1976:82) concludes that many elderly who live in the inner-city "must relinquish their need for intimacy in order to take care of more basic needs (such as shelter and food), whose satisfaction precludes all forms of intimacy and dependence".

Liebow (1967) also describes the social world of the inner-city culture in a similar fashion. Rarely did he encounter exchanges of secret thoughts, private hopes or fears. And friendships, when they did exist, were easily uprooted by the tug of economic self-interest. "Friendships are nurtured and supported by exchanges of money, goods or services" (Leibow, 1967:174). Liebow found few examples of co-operation among people, except for those interactions necessary for obtaining or sustaining basic needs. Eckert (1980) similarly found a lack of friendships among inner-city hotel residents and attributed this to a fear of being exploited by others.

Ethnographic studies of the inner-city culture concern themselves mainly with descriptions of what can be broadly interpreted as social interaction. Leisure is rarely explicitly dealt with, although it is touched on in discussions of other things. Stephens (1976) acknowledges that inner-city elderly experience a surplus of leisure time, and it is generally spent alone in their rooms. The leisure activities identified by Stephens include drinking, betting and socializing in the main lobby of the hotel. "Relationships which emerge in the course of these activities, however, are fairly transitory, superficial and non-intimate" (Stephens, 1976:112).

A study of Edmonton's inner-city conducted in 1977 by the Co-West research team also examined the leisure experiences of the elderly. The report cited three main inadequacies in relation to recreation for inner-city elderly. First, there existed a general lack of recreational opportunities. Second, the cost of recreational opportunities in existence were beyond the means of most inner-city elderly. Finally, the study indicated a lack of green/open space available in the inner-city. The Co-West report also acknowledged that many elderly spend a great deal of their day alone in their rooms and do not visit one another. Their major recommendation was for the development of small community centres, coffee houses and eating places for casual get togethers. It is not clear what criteria the authors used to define recreational opportunities and whether they considered only organized or structured recreational programs. Certainly, leisure or recreational experiences among individuals of a lower class may be radically different from experiences among those of a higher status. For example, as this thesis will demonstrate, the two most common or favourite activities among inner-city elderly are card playing and informal visiting. The recommendations of the study, however, do support the need for informal and unstructured interventions, as opposed to highly organized efforts, to improve recreational experiences among inner-city elderly.

2.3 Service Approaches

-Exploring Roles From Charity To Self-Help

Concern for poor people is nothing new. For more than two centuries now, private charities, state agencies and individuals have been attempting to provide aid to the casualties of our social and economic systems. Biklen's (1983) overview of service approaches provides an excellent framework for a discussion of how society has responded to the poor who live in our inner-cities. According to Biklen, there are three modes of service provision. They are the charity model, professionalism and community organization. Essentially, the charity model was society's first response to disadvantaged groups. Professionalism and later community organization evolved as preferred service approaches in the twentieth century. It is interesting to note that Zuscar's (1987) book which details the history of service delivery in Edmonton's inner-city provides distinct and vivid examples of all three of Biklen's service models. It warrants mention that in some instances, particularly when staff do not share similar philosophies, organizations can and do simultaneously display elements of all three service modes. This will be discussed further in the data analysis section of this thesis.

The charity model afforded the rich a means of doing good, which in turn made them look good to their peers and social community. Individuals who promoted charity for inner-city residents were often prominent citizens or members of religious groups. While the charity model appeared to be based on good will, it was used, often unknowingly, as a disguise for moral domination and social control. The charity approach is perhaps best exemplified in the following quote from Ian Adam's Poverty Wall (1970:73): "All those nice middle-class ladies with their service clubs and associations get blasted for treating the poor as a "project"....The problem is, they sincerely believe they are helping to improve people's lives." Since the charity approach is based on an obligation to help those less fortunate, the helpers are absolved from responsibility to examine society and their role in it. This is perhaps the greatest weakness of this helping orientation, in that, although services and aid are developed in order to try and help those in need, they do little to change the larger picture. The provision of food or shelter for the poor, while needed, means that energy or resources are not available to tackle the broader social issues that perpetuate poverty. At the same time, agencies like the Salvation Army, in the past and today, are to be commended for their efforts, since they are often the only agency who is at least committed enough to do something about the plight of the poor.

A second but related criticism of the charity approach is that charitable organizations are known to make decisions as to the worthiness of a particular individual to receive benefits or services. The early charitable associations held the following view: "...there were two kinds of poor: those whose impoverishment stemmed from their bad moral attitudes, their slovenliness, their fondness for alcohol and so forth and those whose impoverished state was a function of ill fate (Biklen, 1983:66).

The underlying expectation that charity workers had of the first group was that these individuals should develop and exhibit proper moral determination and self-discipline. Screening out the unworthy from the worthy meant that charity workers provided services that were not always fairly distributed and which, when provided, came with strict admonishments and reprimands.

Professionalism, on the other hand, promised to treat society's disadvantaged in a more equitable and scientific manner. The professional approach to social services was viewed as a vast improvement over the moral evangelism perpetuated by the charity model, especially since the charity model could not possibly provide help to everyone who needed it. A collective obligation to help others in our society led to a rise in the public provision of social services. The eventual involvement of government, their acceptance of some responsibility and their commitment of public money, were important steps in the improvement of services for the poor and other disadvantaged groups. This meant that more people in need could now receive help as opposed to being left to charity.

The professionalism of social work also brought with it the development of a distinct body of knowledge, facts, hypotheses and theories about the human condition. Knowledge was gained through academic training, which drew on psychological, sociological and even medical models. Having gained expertise in the area of understanding and helping people, professionals claimed that they would be able to provide improved and equitable services to all people in need. As a result, the provision of services to disadvantaged groups in our society primarily became the domain of trained social workers and counsellors.

Professionalism, although it promised greater social equality and more democracy than the charity model could deliver, still had its drawbacks. One of the main problems of the professional approach to human services is that "Institutionalized charity bears little resemblance to personal acts of good will" (Biklen, 1983:65). Professionalism resulted in trained social workers and counsellors doing the work that had previously been performed by lay people. In the process, it often became bureaucratic and impersonal; and because social workers represented the state, indeed the public interest, in their dealings with clients, the relationship often became adversarial. Moreover, the conditions for the elderly and poor living in the inner-city never really changed as a result of the professionalisation of social services. In fact, as the data in section 6.3 reveals, it may have resulted in further problems rather than solutions.

Professionalism as a helping approach, while definitely an improvement over the charity model, still carries traces reminiscent of its predecessor. The provision of social services by professionals to people in need is similar to the selling of a consumer product. "Repayment, while not financial, still exists in the form of deference or compliance - that is, good and predictable behaviour on the part of the client" (Eckert, 1980:102).

Many of the social-service agencies in inner-city areas are missionary oriented, even those not affiliated with religion. The services are still missionary in nature in that the client is expected to adopt the caregivers' (middle-class) values, attitudes and behaviors. Even the term "rehabilitation", which is used by some social-service agencies, connotes individual deficiencies. According to the Oxford Dictionary, rehabilitation means "restoring something or someone to privileges, reputation or proper condition" (1988:741). This approach to service, tends to perpetuate the notion that needs result from individual faults rather than from societal or institutional deficiencies. In addition, rehabilitatees are led to believe that the proper condition to which they have been restored, is indeed proper and right.

The main criticism of both the charity model and the professionalism approach to service is that neither takes into consideration the social structures, economic conditions and societal prejudices that, in fact, create and sustain the current conditions in the inner-city. According to Biklen (1983) this results in an anti-change service orientation that treats the symptoms, and disregards the causes. For example, soup kitchens may relieve the immediate hunger of inner-city elderly, but do very little to alter the societal conditions that cause their hunger. When all of an agency's resources and efforts go into what amount to bandaid solutions, longer term adjustments in the bigger picture cannot be adequately pursued.

What are the alternative service approaches then? Some government programs and voluntary groups have, in recent years, moved beyond the charity, missionary and professionalism approaches to one of community organization and self help. The community organization approach to service, as outlined by Biklen (1983) advocates that helpers work as allies with disadvantaged groups. This cannot occur unless workers are prepared to adapt their helping stance to one of "True collaboration which requires that professionals relinquish their positions of power and enter into situations that are somewhat unfamiliar with the aim of learning new ways to 'help' others" (Toro, 1987:32). Much of what the community organization service approach seeks to do goes against the tenets of both the charity model and the professionalism model. Rather than feeling pity for the individuals with whom they work, community organizers feel anger towards the social conditions that create degradation of individuals. Unlike the charity model or professionalism approach, the community organization orientation seeks to reform institutions rather than people. Although professionals can and do participate in the community organization approach, often this entails speaking out against the organization or network of which they are themselves a part.

Another alternative similar to the community organization service approach can be found in the writings of Galper (1980). He advocates radical social work, essentially a socialist perspective on social work which would integrate politics with one's commitment to helping others. Radical social work varies from traditional social work in three main ways. First, radical social work has both short and long term goals. This entails a commitment to the immediate provision of services to people experiencing difficulties in life, as well as a commitment to future changes in society.

Second, radical social work does not focus solely on the individual; the socio-economic system is also considered as a force in people's lives and as an object for change. Radical social work advocates not only personal adjustment, but institutional change as well. Finally, radical social work seeks to arrive at collective solutions with, not for, the people who are experiencing the difficulties.

Self-help as a method for providing support to individuals while working towards change has also gained popularity among many disadvantaged groups all across North America. This growth in self-help reflects, in part, the growth of professionalism and the service society. For example, Martin & Martin (1985) suggest that professionalized caregiving has squashed the helping spirit of many lay people and that a revival of the helping instinct among people is only possible through the development of the self-help approach. The self-help model provides an alternative to traditional, formal organizations and groups are often born out of the belief that institutional responses to individual's problems are inadequate. While often initiated from the outside, which can be a detriment, the self-help approach seeks to generate the desire for help from within the group, and utilizes the strengths and abilities of its members to set priorities and achieve goals. The self-help process can be under-mined if professionals take on a dictator rather than a facilitator role within the group. By imposing their own values, attitudes and solutions on members of the group, the professionals are actually engaging in a form of brainwashing, although it may be more subtle than that practiced by bureacratic helping organizations or charity agencies. However, if professionals are supportive of the self-help approach and respect the wishes and strengths of the people involved, they can be an excellent resource for groups. Particularly if they can help individuals to see that their personal conditions or situations are not necessarily their own creation, as in the case of battered women for example. The self-help approach provides promise of making broader social changes by empowering the very individuals who are themselves victims of undesirable social conditions.

Operation Friendship is one example of an inner-city organization that is committed to the self-help approach:

> People should have an opportunity to be of service to their neigh-bours, to other human beings. The seniors here are involved in every aspect of our drop-in centre. By volunteering to help carry out the programs and services, the community is enhanced and perhaps more importantly, the self-esteem of our volunteers is enhanced (Operation Friendship, 1988:28).

By encouraging seniors to volunteer in their communities, the extreme isolation and loneliness of many elderly can be reduced, and, by helping others, many seniors are able to regain feelings of self-worth. In a similar vein, Ruffini & Todd (1979) discuss the simple yet powerful ways that seniors can and should help one another in inner-city neighbourhoods. Some of the examples include peer support visiting, running of errands for less mobile seniors and informal health status checks of elderly neighbours. Milligan and Maryland (1987) also found overwhelming support for the potential of the self-help approach in service provision for elderly in the inner-city. The results of their survey indicated that the elderly found their own peers to be less threatening as service providers and often more empathetic than well meaning professionals.

-Inner-city Challenges To Service Provision

One of the greatest challenges to the development and improvement of services for individuals in the inner-city is the need for service providers and policy makers to change both their image and their roles. The views of those that live in the inner-city towards formal service providers vary, depending, of course, on individual experiences. For example, in a survey of the perception of health care service providers in Edmonton's inner-city, respondents complained that both health and social service providers were hurried, were uncaring, that they treated individuals as cases or numbers rather than people and that they tended to withhold information (Morse, 1983:2). Mistrust, indifference, cynicism, hostility and alienation are some of the feelings towards service providers that have been clearly identified by previous researchers (Whyte: 1955, Siegal:1978, Ward: 1979, Eckert: 1980 & Morse:1983).

Siegal (1978) found that individuals who live in the inner-city are often confronted by situations beyond their control, such as robberies, muggings or land-lords that take advantage of them, and he concluded that people need to develop adaptive strategies. The most common strategy he observed was that of resignation or hopelessness. Rather than expressing anger or outrage at the unfairness of situations or living conditions, the powerlessness is turned inward instead. Seaman's (1959) classic work "On the Meaning Of Alienation" describes it has having two distinct characteristics: a subjective belief you are powerless and the perception that one's actions are meaningless and irrelevant to any outcome. In both of these exists a condition of apathy, which causes the individual to seriously question the utility or efficacy of any specific behaviour. Siegal (1978) confirms this condition of apathy in his conclusion that individuals who live in the inner-city seldom look to official bodies or government service providers for redress or grievance, since few seriously expect that any such efforts could be fruitful.

Of all the government services provided to seniors, the social security system is perhaps the most frequent bureaucratic institution that elderly in the inner-city must deal with. It is not uncommon for those who live in the inner-city to view the welfare department as being imbued with malevolent omnipotence (Siegal, 1978:80). In addition to being viewed as an all powerful being, the system is also seen as complex and confusing. When faced with a great deal of red tape in applying for social security or having their claims investigated, many feel frustrated or powerless in their efforts. One man that I met told me that, although he was sixty six years old, he had a very difficult time applying for the government pension..."It got to the point, where I was just ready to give up....I knew I was entitled to the money, but it just didn't seem worth the hassle. That's when the girl in the office (Operation Friendship) started helping me. I got my first cheque in a month" (Field notes: Harry, June, 1989). Climbing through all the necessary hoops to receive service is tiresome for most and sometimes impossible for others.

While most inner-city elderly feel intimidated by government bureaucratic organizations, a few become cynical instead. This cynicism is further perpetuated when complaints by individuals or attempts to change the system are ignored. "It doesn't matter what you think. Social workers, they're going to do it their way, regardless...I talked to her before about putting in a place to have coffee, but she didn't think it was a good idea" (Field notes: Frank, Sept., 1989). What often results is that individuals avoid any contact with government agencies, because they have experienced such frustrations in the past. "Nobody around here trusts government workers: They haven't done us a bit of good, no sir..." (Field notes: Jack, Aug., 1988).

As Eckert (1980:105) summarizes in his ethnographic account of inner-city dwellers in the U.S., having to deal with government services was seen as being a necessary aspect of life, but government workers were not held in high regard or given a great degree of trust. His final analysis of the perception of those that live in the inner-city towards government programs and officials is one of indifference tempered with realism. Most acknowledged that, in order to receive services (namely financial support), one had to know the system, but that didn't mean one had to like the system or be supportive of it. Similarly, Siegal (1978:80) found that the majority of hotel tenants in one U.S. city viewed formal service providers (mainly social service and health workers) neither as good nor bad, but part of a cumbersome, complex organization with which they realized only co-existence was possible.

When governments and their services get bigger, people get smaller. When people feel small - when nothing they can say or do makes any difference, when they are not given information or consulted regarding matters that affect them - they become increasingly alienated. The professionalism approach to service often creates and serves to maintain this alienation among consumers. The symptoms of this alienation are then manifested in feelings of frustration, apathy, cynicism and hostility. These feelings can also become significant barriers to the establishment and development of self-help groups in the inner-city. As Borman & Pasquale (1983) point out in their study of self-help groups in North American cities, it is uncommon for self-help groups to exist in inner-city areas. The barriers to this fall under two general categories: those barriers created by service providers and those that stem from the attitudes among people who live in the inner-city. Barriers created by service providers include a lack of awareness of the value of self-help, a general lack of interest in encouraging the development of self-help groups, a lack of resources (namely staff) to pursue the self-help approach and finally, in the inner-city, many agencies experience difficulty in recruiting members to participate in self-help groups. Those who live in the inner-city infrequently become involved in self-help groups due to a lack of awareness of existing groups, lack of availability of diverse types of groups, the perception that existing groups do not address immediate concerns, cultural (and perhaps age-related) norms that may discourage the sharing of personal problems with strangers, and high crime levels which promote suspicion of strangers and fear of travelling at night. All of these barriers need to be recognized and addressed if the self-help approach is to work in the inner-city environment.

The natural response to the needs of people in the inner-city, at least in the past, has been to develop more services, but this has resulted in an expanded bureaucracy, increased costs and feelings of alienation among the very people the service providers are trying to help. According to the Co-West report, the most urgent response is not for more services in the inner-city, perhaps not even for more money. What is needed and is more difficult to provide is a process that will begin to reverse the direction of services and promote a client-driven focus which would enhance the development and growth of self-help among inner-city elderly. As the Co-West report states in its conclusion, "Since little has been done in the past to improve conditions for seniors in the inner-city, many have become extremely apathetic about the possibility of change" (Co-West, 1977:43).

What Co-West proposed for the inner-city in 1977 was not the development of another program, but rather a new way of interacting between service providers and people. "Development should not be viewed as a cluster of benefits given to people in need, but rather as a process by which a populace acquires greater mastery over its own destiny" (Goulet,1978:29). While the poor of Canada are finally receiving some duly deserved attention, Adams (1970) suggests the twofold question we should be asking is, how much is going to be done - and how fast - as long as decisions are made by people who know nothing of what it is to be poor. At the time of their study (1977), the Co-West research team found there were very few services in Edmonton's inner-city that were client-driven or that allowed for citizen involvement. Their report indicated a need for services which considered seniors living in the inner-city as competent, contributing members of society and which included them in the planning of services and approaches. All too often, professionals define the problems of their clients, believing it is their job to do this. Marshall (1987), who is herself an older person, feels that many of the problems of the elderly have been artificially created and the problems they do have are often ignored. This is the result of planning for old people without seeking their input. This approach not only keeps the 'professionals' in business, but it serves as a deterrent to seniors helping themselves and one another.

2.4 Comment

Having presented literature in three distinct substantive areas, the following discussion seeks to introduce some of the most crucial biases and gaps that exist in the literature on aging, leisure theory, inner city areas and service provision. Each of the issues raised in the following section will also be further substantiated in chapters four, five and six by way of empirical evidence.

The two dominant models of aging (activity theory and dis-engagement theory) which were presented in the literature review, clearly conceptualize the aging process as a socio-psychological one and fail to acknowledge the fact that aging is a process which is socially constructed. In particular, both the activity theory and the dis-engagement theory ignore the tremendous impact that class, as a mediating structure, has on the experience of aging among individuals. This impact will be made evident by the stories told in chapter four.

The literature available on the inner city (with the exception of Hall, 1981) consistently tend to treat it as a curiosity rather than as a phenomenon which is created and sustained by political, economic and social forces. This is particularly pervasive among authors who cite problems such as alcoholism or mental illness as being characteristices of inner city areas and the people who live there, rather than symptoms of larger social issues. Chapter five provides vivid examples of the forces that combine to create the kinds of personal troubles that many people who live in the inner city experience.

Finally, the literature reviewed in the area of service approaches showed us that not all service responses are equally sensitive to the fact that social structures can and do influence people's circumstances. The two service approaches most likely to recognize the influence of social forces, are the radical social work model and the self-help approach. Unfortunately, in the field of leisure and recreation, professionalism, which neglects to consider social forces in any detail and tends to disempower individuals through its bureaucratic nature, is the dominant service approach. The discussion in chapter six, under the sub-heading of "The Un-Management Of Leisure" examines the un-suitability of the professional approach in the development of leisure opportunities for inner city elderly and suggests instead, that leisure is best left un-managed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In the field of sociology, the term methodology reflects more broadly the epistemological foundation upon which research is based, while methods refers directly to the techniques one engages in to collect data. The technology or the actual mechanics of data collection, while influenced by a researcher's method-ological framework and certainly related to it, need to be distinguished from methodology, since methodology refers to the assumptions that govern what kinds of observations will be admitted. For the sake of clarification of this important relationship and to give sufficient space to the discussion of both methodology and methods, they will be dealt with in separate sections, beginning with an epistemological discussion. This discussion will include a review of various methodologies and their appropriateness to certain empirical subject matter. The primary intent of this first section will be to provide rationale for both the methodology and methods which guided this research project. The remainder of the chapter will include a discussion of the actual methods engaged in and issues related to the research process itself.

3.1 Epistemological Discussion

Epistemology refers to theories of knowledge, or more precisely, it is the theory of how we come to have knowledge of our external world. We know things because we experience them, observe them or operationalize them. Every research problem essentially has several angles which the researcher can explore. Empirical subject matter can be studied in many ways. Use of controlled experiments, surveys, or observation in natural settings are just some examples. The determining factor in the method(s) one chooses is directly related to the goal(s) of the researcher. For example, the survey method utilizing a large sample size, may be the preferred method for obtaining demographic information about a population, whereas the same method may be inappropriate for understanding the depth of people's relationships with each other. With respect to human action, many sociologists proceed on the assumption that the question of "what's going on here?" can only be accurately answered by uncovering the actor's interpretation of the situation. Their research tries to get at the nuances of interpretation in some depth, with relatively small numbers of people, rather than to rely on quantification as the warrant of truth. Truth or reality do not exist "out there," but reflects agreement among individuals.

3.2 Theoretical Framework Of Study

Essentially a combination of two theoretical frameworks guided this study; naturalism and symbolic interactionism. These frameworks helped to determine not only the observations to be made, but also how to make sense of those observations. The broad theoretical perspective of naturalism, which allows for consideration of a wide range of data, was primarily utilized for this research study. This perspective emphasizes "...commitment to actively enter the world of native people and to render those worlds understandable from the standpoint of a theory that is grounded in the behaviours, languages, definitions, attitudes and feelings of those studied" (Denzin, 1971:166). This approach enables the researcher to observe and come to know how individuals see themselves and their world. Perhaps most importantly, this perspective recognizes that humans have social selves and because of this, act in ways that reflect their definitions and feelings about situations. In this way, actions or behaviours observed while in the field are considered within the context of the actors' beliefs, feelings and definition of the situation. Conversely, expressions of feelings and beliefs are related to, and tend to make greater sense in connection with the actor's behaviours, actions and situation.

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that attempts to explain human behaviour in terms of meanings. According to the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, people are constantly in the process of interpreting and defining the situations in which they find themselves (Bogdan, 1972). Individuals see the various aspects of the situations in which they are a part of from their own points of view. Individuals' views of the social order depend on their place in that order. A researcher operating from this framework must try to "feel one's way inside the experience of the actor" (Blumer, 1969:3). This particular point is of extreme importance, especially considering that this project was trying to reach and understand inner-city elderly, whose collective voice is rarely heard mainly because of their subordinated place in the social order.

Gubrium (1975) conducted a study of a nursing home which was grounded in the assumptions of symbolic interactionism. In the preface of his book, Gubrium states that the purpose behind his study of Murray Manor was to: "...to examine how the participants perceive their goals and needs, play their roles and emerge as a social entity" (Gubrium, 1975: i). He was interested not only in how the people of Murray Manor organized their behaviour, but also in the interpretations that they gave to their behaviours and activities. Since the meanings of things are modified through an individuals' interpretive processes and their interactions with others, it is not unusual that two or more individuals encountering the same situation or experience will emerge with different impressions. Gubrium (1975) found countless examples of how the staff's view of life in the nursing home was vastly different from those views of the residents. Since uncovering the individuals' point of view and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences and situations is a crucial element of both critical sociology and naturalist research grounded in symbolic interactionism, research of this kind would require a methodological approach which would be able to elicit this. The methodological approach best suited to the goals of this research project is the ethnographic approach.

Ethnography entails observing a culture and listening first hand to accounts by people who are a part of that culture. Ethnography is, as Spradley so aptly stated, "the work of describing a culture" (Spradley, 1979:12). At its most basic level, it consists of the observation, description and analysis of the activities and points of view of members of a social group. In order to do an ethnography, the researcher must engage in what is called fieldwork, which is a broad term that can include any or all of the following: participating in activities, assuming a role or roles within a group, asking questions, having conversations, watching people and taking extensive fieldnotes.

The primary reason why the ethnographic approach was chosen for this particular research project was the desire to try to understand what life is like in the inner-city from the perspective(s) of the elderly who live there. Indeed, the central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from a native point of view, since invariably things never look the same from the outside as they do from the inside. Ethnographic case studies are generally of small groups; usually their interest, if they are interesting, lies in their highlighting for us, more clearly than other less personal kinds of data can usually do, social dynamics, problems or aspects of life that have a wider significance.

To a large extent, social science inquiry has been dominated by two main paradigms: positivism and interpretation. "Positivism, a doctrine in the philosophy of science is characterized mainly by an insistence that science can only deal with observable entities known directly to experience" (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1986:163). This view was first introduced into sociology by Comte (1798-1857) who believed that sociological inquiry must be scientific, which meant that only that which could be directly tested and measured was of value to sociologists. The primary goal of positivism was to predict and control by establishing causal relationships. Durkheim (1858-1917) was also a positivist and believed that social facts could be approached and studied in the same way that truths were determined in the natural sciences. Sociologists of the Frankfurt School were among the first to criticize this paradigm, claiming that it presented simplistic and misleading accounts of human actions. Positivism neglects the position of the person(s) being observed and thus cannot account for experiences or questions not outwardly visible (Fletcher, 1974). In positivist research, the distance between the researcher and subject(s) is maximized. The methods used by those that subscribe to positivism are quantitative ones that require the researcher to operationalize intangible concepts (like social class or self-esteem) in terms of measurable data such as income levels or test scores. The objective of this type of research is to establish statistical relationships between variables and to allow the researcher to test and refine hypotheses about these relationships. Interpretation, on the other hand, is concerned with preserving, interpreting and understanding meaning and action (Fletcher, 1974). In contrast to the positivist paradigm, in which there is deliberately little interaction between the researcher and the subject, the interpretive paradigm calls for detailed and sometimes intimate observations of the world of the subject(s), therefore subject-researcher distance is minimized. Unlike the positivist paradigm, which neglects that which is not outwardly observable, the interpretive paradigm requires that the researcher investigate an issue or problem from the inside, ie. from the actor's point of view. The interpretive paradigm asks researchers to try to draw out and make explicit that which an individual may only know tacitly. Tacit knowledge is that which the informant may not normally talk about or express in direct ways (Bogdan, 1976). Human beings often take their own culture for granted, thus their motivations or reasons for behaving as they do are often outside of their awareness (Spradley, 1980). Therefore, qualitative methods such as participant observation, unstructured interviews and analysis of personal documents are often used by researchers operating within the interpretive paradigm. "The qualitative method is guaranteed to produce something, if only because it lets informants speak; gives weight to their words and lets them be whole people making a lot of sense" (Fletcher, 1974:143).

The qualitative approach seeks to understand the actor's behaviours and point of view. This is often true of the critical sociological approach, the role of which is to "... detect and unmask existing forms of belief in order to enhance the emancipation of inividuals in our society" (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1986:57). Ideally, research conducted in the critical sociological tradition results in not only a negative intellectual judgement of society's systems and processes; it also becomes, in itself, a revolutionary activity. Fletcher (1974) suggests that critical sociologists feel compelled to wake up the sleep walkers that they are studying, whereas other researchers, both qualitative and quantitative, simply want to trace their paths. Some social researchers indeed are content to simply discover and report phenomenon; however, those who are guided by the critical approach desire to use their discoveries to empower individuals and to change social structures and beliefs.

Critical ethnography is characterized by three main features. The first is the necessity of using interpretive methods to uncover both the actors' points of view and their intentions and desires. The second feature is the focus on social conditions and how these affect an individual's beliefs and behaviours. Finally, the critical model seeks knowledge for the purpose of changing or improving conditions. Ultimately the goal of critical sociology is the enlightenment and empowerment of the actors it studies, "a transformation which will increase their autonomy by making it possible for them to determine collectively the conditions under which they will live" (Fay, 1975:105). Critical theorists look at the problems of everyday life with the intention of moving towards solving them. Viewed in this light, research driven by the critical sociological tradition can improve the development of policies, service approaches and programs designed for the elderly who live in the inner-city by providing an opportunity for them to have input. Research conducted within the critical sociological tradition presents not only a picture of social reality, but also seeks to act as a catalyst for change. Critical sociology strives to

> ...articulate the felt grievances of a specific group of actors, to provide a vocabulary in virtue of which they and their situations can be conceptualized, to explain why the conditions in which they find themselves are frustrating to them and to offer a programme of action which is intended to end with the satisfaction of these desires (Fay, 1975:98).

By engaging in the ethnographic approach, informed by the critical sociological tradition, this thesis will present not only a visual image of what it is like to live in the inner-city, but also a critical commentary on the forces that perpetuate these conditions.

3.3 Research Design

According to Biklen (1981) research design is merely a phrase that refers to how one intends to proceed. Particularly in the area of ethnographic field work, it is sometimes impossible to fully plan how one will conduct research until one knows more about the setting. Plans evolve as both subjects and sources of data become more apparent to the field researcher during the course of the fieldwork. Burgess (1987) describes ethnographic research as being anything but linear and suggests it is ludicrous to conceive of social research as having a distinct beginning, middle and end. The complexity which characterizes qualitative research is in part due to the interaction between the researcher and the researched.

> Nowhere is this more evident than in the conduct of field research, which is characterized by flexibility. Here, there are no set rules, rigid procedures and fixed roles. Much will depend on the researcher, those who are researched and the setting (Burgess, 1987:31).

Engaging in a participant-observer role was the primary technique utilized to collect data. However, this technique itself actually comprises many elements, the first of which is to take a particular role within the culture to examine first hand the social situation from the participant's point of view (Burgess, 1987). Activities then as a participant-observer can vary, depending on the role taken. In my case, I chose to become a volunteer at Operation Friendship. This afforded me a great deal of contact with the seniors, both on a one-to-one basis and in larger groups. Some of the activities I engaged in included driving seniors for shopping, errands or medical appointments; visiting them in their homes (ie: rooms in rental buildings); helping to prepare and serve meals; playing pool or cards; drinking (too much) coffee; and attending weekly staff meetings. In addition to these varied activities, I also had, and treasure some very unique experiences. For example, I spent one afternoon picking bottles from alley trash cans with a very congenial man who was also a great conversationalist. We made in total, twenty-five dollars, which he graciously offered to split with me! I also spent another lovely summer afternoon in a downtown park feeding bread crumbs to the birds, an activity I hadn't engaged in since I was a child.

Life history interviews were also informally conducted with five inner-city elderly. The value of this particular method of research is that it enables the researcher to uncover and highlight areas which are often neglected in conventional research approaches. For example, the survey method of research may indicate that a certain proportion of elderly who live in the inner-city are alcoholics or are mentally ill, but it tells us nothing about their previous identities or experiences. In this way, the survey method can be seen as context-stripping, since it cannot adequately account for what went on before or during the questionnaire. The survey approach, "....which aims to make generalizations about specific characteristics of a population group...." (Phillipson,1986:328) also tends to further advance the misconception that the aged are a homogeneous group. The life history approach, on the other hand, emphasizes not only the present experiences of an individual, but the past as well, which is important to consider in light of aging as a life-long process rather than a single event. It allows the researcher to come to know an old person as a whole person, with a past and with important memories. In addition to this factor, speaking about one's past and one's former experiences serves an important role for elderly both in maintaining status (since inner-city elderly, in particular, experience such a lack of status) and for meeting the need to reminisce. The life history approach enabled me to learn something about the elderly not only as old people, but as children, adolescents and young adults and, perhaps even more importantly, meant that the elderly also got something out of sharing their histories with me.

In addition to having many conversations throughout my fieldwork, semi-structured interviews were also held with staff members and with some of the inner-city elderly, especially during the feedback process of the research. I continued to spend time at Operation Friendship even after my data were collected so that I could maintain contact with individuals during the process of writing up my findings. In retrospect, this was invaluable and well worth the extra time spent in the field. These feedback sessions confirmed my tentative analyses and gave me additional data which supported my themes. As well, they raised my own level of confidence in my data analysis efforts.

Finally, content analysis was also employed as a technique for gathering data. Minutes of meetings, agency reports, policy documents and newspaper clippings were also used as sources of information. Using multiple sources allows the researcher to address a broader range of issues and makes it possible to triangulate the information and perceptions of various people and sources (Yin, 1984). This was particularly helpful in addressing the area of service approaches, because using multiple sources enabled me to see and hear from both sides, ie: the views of the service provider as well as the views of the consumer or client.

3.4 The Setting

The inner-city is located to the east and north of the downtown business area. The actual physical make up of the inner-city is comprised mainly of rooming houses, single-resident occupancy hotels, bars, coffee shops, corner stores and pawn shops. There are also a few older homes that are still standing; however most of them are in great need of repair. One particularly startling characteristic of the inner-city is the lack of green or open space.

Victimization and crime are rampant in the inner-city. In 1989 alone, the Edmonton Police force responded to over seven-hundred incidents in the inner-city. The elderly who live in the inner-city are extremely vulnerable targets of victimization. Accounts of being held at knife point for a bag of groceries or a twenty-dollar bill are common. In the winter, it is not unusual for the elderly to be held up for their boots, shoes or winter coat. Hardly any of the seniors that I met, both men and women, ever go out when it is dark. In fact, elderly women are almost invisible in the inner-city, very few women visit the drop-in centre and rarely did I meet women when I visited rooming houses in the area. While it may be true that most older women live with families or in nursing homes, it may also be that elderly women who do live in the inner-city are even more isolated than the men are, due to the harsh environment in which they live.

Operation Friendship, which served as my research base, is a private, non-profit social service agency, which has been in existence since 1969 and focuses on serving the needs of inner-city elderly living in the Boyle St., McCauley, Norwood and Parkdale neighbourhoods. The agency is funded by the United Way (33%), Family and Community Support Services (29%), Alberta Municipal Affairs (10%), community donations (10%), Winspear Foundation (8%), fees (6%), Southminister United Church (3%) and miscellaneous grants from governmental and private agencies (1%).

3.5 Negotiating and Maintaining Access

Access in relation to ethnographic studies simply cannot be conceived of as a single entity or one-time occurrence. As Burgess (1987) points out, gaining access is an essential phase of the research process, being both the pre-requisite as well as the pre-condition for conducting research. Achieving and sustaining rapport by entering into real relationships with other people is both a goal and an outcome of this type of research. Access is an ongoing process that does not end until the researcher has completely exited from the field.

When I first considered doing research on inner-city elderly, one of my immediate questions was "How?" I discussed this research interest with a friend who was at the time doing fieldwork with elderly women in another context, and she suggested that I contact Operation Friendship. I made an appointment to meet with the Executive Director. On the appointed day, I arrived with my file in hand, prepared to discuss my research interest (mainly to explore the social world of inner-city elderly) and to find out whether or not it would be feasible to utilize the agency as a research base for participant observation. I found the Director to be immediately supportive of both my research agenda and my involvement in the agency. The only cautionary word that he (ever) gave me was to respect the rights and wishes of his clientele as to whether they wanted to be a part of my research.

Once I had decided that taking on the role of volunteer would be the most advantageous way for me to observe and take part in life in the inner-city, the next step in negotiating access was an interview with the Volunteer Co-ordinator. Again, I was greeted with enthusiasm and support for my research endeavour. Several options were afforded me as to my involvement as a volunteer. Everything from one-to-one visiting to helping to prepare meals. The Volunteer Co-ordinator was very supportive of my research goals and continually checked with me throughout my fieldwork to see if indeed the volunteer activities that I became engaged in were enabling me to collect the kinds of data and observations that I needed. Research in the field can be hampered by gate keepers of organizations who are suspicious of, or feel threatened by, the researcher (Yin,1984). In my particular case, neither the Director nor the staff of Operation Friendship posed any barrier at all to my collection of data. In fact, as my fieldwork progressed, they became excellent sources of feedback and support. Thus, access to the agency and to the people who worked there was fairly easily negotiated and was maintained throughout my field work.

On the other hand, access to the individuals who used the agency, the inner-city elderly, while not necessarily difficult, required a more personal investment, especially in the area of building rapport and trust.

Liebow (1967:13) suggests that for most researchers, the first couple of weeks in a field setting is a crucial time and one in which a "minimal level of belonging" must be achieved in order to further build trust and personal relationships. Being a volunteer at Operation Friendship meant that I was there on a regular basis and that I was visible to the seniors who came to the drop-in. In this way, individuals had an opportunity to check me out first, by observing me, my activities and my interactions with staff and other members. Volunteering gave me a natural and wonderful context within which to gradually develop relationships with individuals who frequented the centre. The process of getting to know the seniors and letting them get to know me was far more casual and less threatening than if I had knocked on their doors requesting a personal interview. It also gave more control to the seniors in that they were able to see me as a real person and to learn something about me before they shared anything of themselves with me.

While access to individuals was something that I continually had to consciously strive for in terms of building trust and rapport, I rarely encountered individuals who would not talk to me. Sometimes I found that participating in a card or pool game created a more relaxed context for conversation, than the more traditional approach of sitting across the table from one another. There are, however, some issues related to access which I would like to discuss. These are safety, lack of control over the pace of research and eccentricity.

As will be discussed in chapter five under the sub-heading of Instant Friendship, there is a considerable amount of socializing that occurs among the elderly in two or three local drinking establishments. I never spent any time at the local bars, even though I was occasionally invited by individuals to join them. Personal safety was the main reason I chose not to go along. Certainly, I may have missed numerous observations and rich data. I also confined my involvement in the neighbourhood to daylight hours, although I would spend the evening at the drop-in centre. Not venturing out on to the streets at night also gave me a sense of what it was like for the seniors who also do not venture out of their rooms at night and are literally held captives in their own community.

Looking back over my early field-note entries, I recall how frustrated I felt in the beginning of my research that I needed to rely on individuals dropping in to the centre, since making appointments to see people was not feasible (few had telephones and fewer still liked to pin themselves down to a certain time and day). This initial frustration stemmed from my own fear that, with so little control, I might never collect enough data to finish a thesis. I forced myself to relax and go with the flow, and I'm glad that I did. Eventually, once people got to know me and trust me, I ended up with more data than I could actually use in this project.

Another issue, though less significant, was that of getting to know some of the more eccentric personalities who live in the inner-city. While they often had the most interesting stories to tell, conventional language was not always adequate for understanding or trying to capture what they were expressing. The following excerpt from my field notes illustrates this point:

Bob: "Well I got myself a new place to live today, it's real nice.

> I'm all moved in"
>
> Me: "Where is your new place?"
>
> Bob: " The Bank"
>
> Me: "Which bank?" (thinking that he was perhaps sleeping on a heating duct outside of a bank somewhere downtown)
>
> Bob: "The Bank of Edmonton, of course"
>
> Me: (On a lucky guess I asked:) "Do you mean the river bank?" He nodded yes and looked at me, as if to say, it took you long enough to figure that out!

To be eccentric is to deviate from the customary. People who are characterized by others as eccentric simply may be operating from unique or different vantage points. I recall a story which one of the staff recounted to me during my early days of fieldwork. It seems that she had been visiting a man who lived in a very dilapidated rooming house. She decided that she would do the man a favour and put pressure on the landlord to paint the walls of this man's room, since it had literally peeled off to the extent that the walls were bare. She had simply assumed that the man would appreciate this gesture. Much to her surprise, he threatened to move out of his room if anyone dared to tamper with it! He had lived in this room for many years, it was his place and he was very content with the condition in which it was in.

3.6 Having Conversations

Whyte (1943:303), author of the classic ethnographic study Street Corner Society, was forewarned early in his study by one of his informants to "Go easy on the 'who', 'what', 'where' and 'why' stuff, you ask those and people will clam up on you. Hang around, let them get to know you and you'll learn the answers in the long run, without even having to ask the questions". Hochschild (1973), author of the Unexpected Community, an ethnographic portrait of a low-income housing project for seniors, also expressed similar sentiments. "I learnt early that it was impolite to pry. They seemed to be saying with their friendly silence, don't ask us a lot of questions....you'll find out about us if you just stick around" (Hochschild, 1973:3). These were extremely valuable pointers which I heeded, especially in the initial weeks of my fieldwork. The inner-city is very much governed by a code of "I mind my business, you mind yours and we'll both get along fine." Question asking, I quickly observed, put one in the role of a professional (nurse, social worker, welfare worker etc). They don't ask each other many questions and don't expect to be asked questions of themselves, unless a professional is trying to gather information about them for some reason. I recall one conversation I had in my early weeks in the field, where I obviously stepped over the question-asking boundary, since the man later asked another member if I was a cop or a social worker? Luckily, Frank told him "She's o.k.. She's just writing a book about us, is all". (Field notes: May, 1989).

The notion of a conversation, as opposed to an interview, implies a certain rhythm or sharing of information or feelings. As Oakley (1987:32) points out, the traditional research interview has been viewed as a type of "pseudo-conversation" in which the interviewer elicits and receives information from the data provider, but does not give any information in return to the interviewee. Thus, the motif of successful interviewing is often expressed as "Be friendly, but not too friendly." One of the major problems with this type of hygienic research is that the interview is not seen as having or producing any personal meaning in terms of social interaction. Oakley recommends the following:

> The mythology of hygienic research, with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives (1987:34).

Since I was involved in one-to-one visiting with elderly who live in the inner-city, engaging in conversations as opposed to interviews was a natural outcome of this volunteer role. It was also the primary means by which much of my data were collected. Once I got to know individuals, I would often broach the subject of using a tape recorder while we talked. I wanted to know how they would feel about that. For the most part, people were generally uncomfortable with the idea of having our conversations on tape. I recall when I asked Joe about using a tape recorder, he didn't think it was a great idea, "Not that you would, you seem like a nice 'girl'...but I wouldn't want anything I say to be used against me somehow" (Field notes: July 1989). When I inquired further as to what he might be afraid to disclose on tape he replied, "Well if I'm bitching to you about Phil (his landlord) or one of the guys around here (his neighbours) it just might get back to them and it could get ugly. I'd just rather not use that machine if it's all the same to you" (Field notes: July, 1989). Generally speaking, several of the inner-city elderly that I met expressed a fear of what might happen to them if their words were captured on tape and happened to fall into the wrong hands. As Charlie told me rather pointedly: "I'll tell you all you want to know about living here...but I won't say a word if you turn that thing (tape recorder) on... I'm not stupid." (Field notes: June, 1989).

3.7 On Being One Of The Guys?

Observing individuals in their natural settings is best achieved when the participant-observer is able to blend into their world and cause as little disruption as possible (Burgess, 1987). Since the majority of individuals that I met and conversed with were elderly males, obviously both my age and gender made it difficult at times to blend in to their world. As was discussed in the previous section on access, my own personal safety was a barrier to both individuals (there were some men that I had been instructed to avoid being alone with) and to particular settings in the inner-city.

Gurney (1985) tells of her experiences as a researcher in a male dominated organization. She admits that: "I tolerated things (for instance, derogatory comments towards women) that made me uncomfortable, but convinced myself they were part of the sacrifices a researcher makes" (1985:57). One of the main reasons she gives for tolerating behaviours, jokes or comments that she normally would not is that she was afraid that if she expressed her views, she would be either kicked out of the research setting, or, worse yet, frozen out. I also, on much fewer occasions than Gurney, was exposed to what I considered offensive jokes or comments. For example, one afternoon at the drop-in I was engaged in conversation with three men, all of whom were divorced. They began talking about their former wives and one man, laughed and said: "Women...you can't live with them and you can't live without them!," to which the other men all laughed and agreed in earnest (Field notes: Graham, Aug.,1989). More often than not, however, when discussing former relationships or marriages, (particularly one to one) the men tended to blame themselves for the break up and not their partners.

Related to gender is the type of relationship that developed between myself and the men that I met. Several of the men thought of themselves as bachelors and were undoubtedly limited in their ability to relate to women as people. I sometimes sensed that certain men were uncomfortable relating to me on a personal level, which also made it somewhat uncomfortable for me as well. For instance, John once asked me if I had a car. I told him "Yes," thinking that he might want a ride to the store or something picked up. I was not prepared for what he asked me! "Well, do you think the two of us could take a trip to Banff?" (Field notes; August, 1989).

Another way in which some of the men tended to relate to me was as a daughter. This was exemplified in comments like, "You remind me of my daughter"; "I've got a daughter, that looks almost like you"; "the way you laugh, you sound just like Christine" (his daughter). There was also a man that I came to know quite well. His name was Joe, and whenever he saw me, he would refer to me with the following term of endearment "There's my girl." Although the woman inside me resented the misuse of the word girl, we did develop a very close relationship, and I felt somewhat privileged that he allowed me to get to know him so well. Joe has two adult daughters who live in B.C., and, although he often talked of them affectionately, he had not seen either of them for several years. He never came out and said it in so many words, but I did feel as if he had adopted me as a daughter. One afternoon, he came into the drop-in centre to inform me that he noticed one of the tires on my car appeared to be losing air. I took the car (I also asked Joe if he wanted to accompany me) to a nearby gas station and sure enough there was a slow leak in the tire, which they promptly repaired. Joe's thoughtfulness and concern undeniably saved me from possible injury and certainly great inconvenience, since I daily drove into the inner-city from a rural area approximately sixty kilometers away.

3.8 Recording Information and the Subsequent Emergence and Analysis of Themes

For each day spent in the field, I maintained a daily log book in which I recorded observations, conversations, events, impressions and tentative interpre-tations. I was careful to distinguish my impressions and tentative analyses from the actual field notes as a way of keeping a separate account of my data analysis process, as well as to maintain the authenticity of the field notes, that is, what was actually observed. I also spent at least an hour or two after each day in the field was finished, going over my field notes and recalling additional observations as well as adding my own personal interpretations of what I had observed.

As my field notes became more extensive, it became important that I develop some kind of classification system. At first, my categories were rather simple and often consisted of one word, for example family or work. I would enter observations, thoughts, bits of conversations, etc. into these categories, which often meant, due to the nature of the entry, that they fit into one or more category. Initially my categorization system was more for indexing information than it was for analyzing it. I continued using these very broad or simple categories until I could identify similar themes or patterns within them. This practice is otherwise known as the saturation of data (Turner, 1981). As I collected more information that either confirmed or rejected original impressions, I became more sophisticated in my catagorization and analysis. Analysis of the data did not really earnestly begin occurring until sufficient field notes were collected, which was approximately five months into the fieldwork. Until that time, I spent tedious hours at the computer inputting data from my field notes into these simple categories. At least I was able to utilize the cut and paste commands of my computer to sort data entries. Unlike the traditional method of photocopying a master list of fieldnotes and then using scissors and glue to categorize the data, I used the computer to accomplish this task and always had available to me the master set of fieldnotes. I was not too concerned at this point with having any definite hypotheses or analysis; I really was more concerned with letting the data speak for itself, which (to my relief!) it eventually did.

Once I had the bulk of my data indexed under these crude or simple headings, I found that by reading over (..and over) the accounts listed under each category, it became increasingly easier to see what was emerging as significant issues or themes. This was both an exhausting and rewarding aspect of the research process, exhausting in that in order to find the patterns it was necessary to immerse oneself in the piles of field work notes and rewarding and exciting when the patterns made themselves visible. For example, in the work category, the theme of loss of roles and respect was very much a recurring and predominant theme. I then used this theme and others like it as new categorical headings and proceeded to develop them more fully by using feedback sessions with clients and staff, theoretical literature, as well as looking at connections between these broader themes.

I utilized the technique of generating grounded theory as advocated by Glaser & Strauss (1981). Essentially grounded theory fits the data collected, having been generated from the data itself, instead of forcing the data to fit the theory. The strategy of grounded theory is based on the realization that qualitative data are not merely descriptive or explorative, but generative as well. Hypotheses can be successfully generated from qualitative data and tend to be more empirically representative than if they were derived prior to data collection and attached to the data. The development of grounded theory, then, is a process of building theory from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA

I have chosen to organize the presentation of my data around two major themes. Each theme is further divided into sub-themes which reflect and capture things that people who came to Operation Friendship actually talked about. Through the presentation of research themes, this section will both illuminate the lives and experiences of inner-city elderly and uncover or highlight some of the systemic or social forces that have affected them. The first theme, Aging As A Social Process, portrays perhaps most vividly the idea that aging and thus the experiences one has during old age is mediated by social structures and factors. This theme, being very broad, also helps to set the stage for the one that follows, which includes accounts of life in the inner-city and a discussion of the culture which exists there.

4. AGING AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

The theme of Aging As A Social Process captures two central ideas. First, it uncovers the various dimensions of the lives of inner-city elderly prior to becoming old. Other authors (Gubrium, Rubinstein, Foner, Matthews & Hess) have stressed the importance of viewing aging as a life-long process rather than as one point in time or as one stage of life. "To conceive of aging as a lifelong process is to recognize that individuals are influenced by their past" (Foner, 1986:12). By the time someone becomes old in our society, they have experienced many things and the memories preserved through reminiscing aid in the process of making sense of one's life. Many of the individuals that I met worked in the construction, mining, forestry or oil industries between the years of 1930 and 1980. Essentially, they were part of a group of pioneers who helped build this province, and, as they shared their life stories with me, it became clear that their previous worklife experiences were very much a part of their current perception of themselves and what it's like to be old. The past clearly becomes a reference point for evaluating and comprehending the present. Second, this particular theme, through the use of examples, contributes in a concrete sense to our understanding of the relationship of social structures to the aging process. The main idea explored within this theme is the extent to which the effects of the men's previous work lifestyles, combined with systemic forces, have resulted in a current lifestyle that is bleak with regard to finances, health, leisure, self-esteem, family relations and friendships.

4.1 My Life's Work

A review of sociological research to date has suggested that for many people, particularly men, the development of people's personal identity is often closely tied to their work (Karp & Yoels, 1985). The work that people are engaged in over their lifetime can and does influence how they think about themselves and how they describe themselves to others. In addition, work can provide individuals with a valued social network. As Foner suggests "Nostalgia for one's job may indicate that work (rather than the specific job) provided the individual with a source of personal identity, satisfaction and connection to others" (1986:37). Since work is seen as the measure of one's worth in our society, many seniors experience a feeling of lack of status upon retirement. If the struggle to maintain self-worth and dignity among middle-class retired seniors is an unyielding one, it can be expected that this struggle is twice as difficult for seniors who have fewer resources, fewer relationships and who are viewed as inferior simply because they did physical work that has left them without savings and now are forced to live in the inner-city. As one Operation Friendship staff member pointed out:

> When people drive through the inner-city, if they look at the old people that live here...there is a tendency to view them simply as bums, old men who have no value in our society. This is the stereotype that they (inner-city elderly) must fight everyday of their lives (Field notes, June, 1989).

In order to resist being labelled as skid row bums, many of the men that I met introduced themselves by sharing stories about their life's work as a way of counteracting society's de-valuation of older people. "When young people look at me, they think, oh he's just an old man, living on skid row. But there's more to me than meets the eye...I've had a damn exciting life, working hard in the Yukon and NorthWest Territories" (Field notes: Harry, August, 1989). Therefore, recollections which serve the purpose of reminding others of their accomplishments and former work status provide inner-city seniors with an opportunity to regain lost status and are very much a part of their self-identity.

Most if not all of the elderly men that I met during the course of my fieldwork were actively and physically involved in their work through out Alberta between the years of 1930 and 1980. They worked primarily in forestry, mining and construction. Geographic mobility, then, was a predominant aspect of their previous lives and job histories. Most who were involved in the blue-collar or resource industries worked away from the city on a seasonal or on-demand basis which meant that stability, either in work or living accommodations, was hard to come by. It was not uncommon to work twelve hour days for two months straight and then have no work again for three or four months. When work did become available again, it almost always required leaving the city and working long, hard hours.

Not only were the actual working conditions harsh, the majority of jobs held little or no benefits, job security or pension plan. Although some of the men may have worked eight to ten months of the year for twenty years or more, they were not given any opportunity to contribute to a portable pension plan and therefore now must rely solely on government pensions. In addition to these factors, many of the men were deemed unemployable by the age of forty-five or fifty (due to the physical demands of their jobs) and were forced to retire at a much earlier age than their counterparts in professional fields and those in permanent labour positions in which there is more job security. All of these elements combined have resulted in a large proportion of older, poor blue-collar workers, many of whom are divorced or who never married, some of whom are now physically disabled, barely subsisting on government pensions, living alone in rooming houses through out the inner-city.

4.2 When You're Forced To Quit

"My back started to give out on me when I hit fifty (years). I didn't want to quit. I'd rather work, but I had no choice" (Field notes: Al, Sept., 1989). Many of the men did not choose to retire, but were forced to as the physical demands of their work became too great. As older workers, many of them also encountered discrimination in attempting to find jobs of a less strenuous nature, and, at their age, found it was almost impossible to receive re-training in another occupation. Until they were old enough to collect senior citizens' pensions, most were then forced to live on welfare.

The toll that hard physical labour and dangerous working environments has taken on several of the elderly men is evident from their disfigured and worn bodies. "I was in mining, up until 1979. Broke my back, when the part of the mine I was working on collapsed. My buddy was killed...I spent three years in the hospital after that...still can't walk decent" (Field notes: Bill, June, 1989). It is also evident that many, as a result of working with toxic chemicals and other industry related by-products, paid the price for it in their health "I can't work anymore...cement dust from construction ruined my lungs. The doctor says it's a wonder I'm still alive. Some days, I can hardly breathe" (Field notes: Tom, October, 1989). Bearing the scars of difficult or dangerous work histories, daily living tasks for many, become almost impossible "I don't know what I'm going to do. I can hardly carry a bag of groceries no more. My back's gotten so bad, years of heavy lifting has done this to me" (Field notes: Graham, July, 1989).

There is a great deal of research which confirms that retirement for many men can be a traumatic experience (Gubrium, 1973, Kaufman, 1986, Karp & Yoels, 1985). Obviously, the less control an individual has over the decision to retire, the greater the likelihood of retirement being experienced as a stressful and difficult process. Retirement is even further complicated for those inner-city elderly who cite disability as their main reason for retiring, since it is their disability that now makes it difficult for them to function in their daily lives.

4.3 Sure, I Get A Pension, But It's Not Enough To Live On

Since the majority of inner-city-elderly men were seasonal blue-collar workers without access to private pension plans. All but a few currently depend, for their survival, solely on government pensions. "I get $540.00 a month and pay $350.00 in rent, so that leaves me with $190.00 for groceries and necessities. It's tight" (Field notes: Dan, May, 1989). Since many of the elderly residents of the inner-city do not work anymore and must rely on often meagre pensions, hustling is seen as a necessity by many.

Hustling is a common phrase and activity among inner-city elderly, it refers to ways of earning money or goods. To hustle is to get by, to engage in some activity, legal or otherwise, to supplement one's income. "I pick bottles mainly because I got no other job I can do. I got to (pick bottles) for the money. It's not a lot, but it helps me get by" (Field notes: Jack, July, 1989). Many of the men that I met claimed they were looking for work; however, no one, to my knowledge, ever returned to work or started a job during my field research. Discriminatory hiring practices with regard to the over-fifty worker, combined with poor physical health, disability, limited work skills and irregular work histories all serve as major obstacles to obtaining work. "Spry 73 year old worker seeking employment, needs funds to live:" this ad was composed and placed in the Edmonton Journal (Tuesday, July 4, 1989: Section C: 7) by an individual who rummages through trash cans and back alleys in search of valuable items to exchange for a few extra dollars. Barred access from conventional jobs, hustling becomes the only feasible alternative for many inner-city elderly.

Ways of hustling or getting by are numerous. They include: (1) bottle picking; (2) scavenging for items which are then brought to the one of 'we buy anything stores' for profit; (3) collecting, which refers to buying or sometimes stealing and re-selling items, such as winter coats, toaster ovens or hot plates; (4) acting as a runner or go-for (earning money or goods by going for cigarettes, alcohol and in some cases groceries); and (5) betting on card games, pool matches or the horses.

For those who are physically disabled and find it difficult to get around, the activity of bottle picking holds little promise. In order to be successful in this form of hustling, one must be relatively free from physical disability and able to cover a substantial area of the city. On a good day, it is not uncommon to make as much as forty dollars, but that means covering as many as ten miles in the process. "Yeh, I just got back from bottle picking, I was over on the south side this morning and then hit the north east this afternoon. Made a good haul...twenty-four dollars"

(Field notes: Jim, August, 1989).

Scavenging, or collecting things from trash cans is a hustling activity that is considered to be low-status. As well, the possibility of finding decent items for resale is not rated high. Scavenging is more often embarked upon by the so called "mental cases" who wheel their overflowing shopping carts from one alley to the next in the pursuit of valuable junk. This particular form of hustling is one that is generally not resorted to unless absolutely necessary.

Related to scavenging is the more respected activity of "collecting" and then selling cast-off items to supplement income. Sometimes the items are stolen or they are bought from another person or at a garage sale, with the intention of re-selling the item at a higher price. Many people are involved in this form of hustling. "Sometimes I take my things to the pawn shop. Depends how bad I need the money. You get money faster from the pawn shop, but you get more money if you can sell the stuff on your own" (Field notes: June, 1989). The notice board at the drop-in is continually covered with tattered bits of paper advertising the sale of various items.

Go-fors or runners are individuals who run errands for others in return for either money or a share in the goods. In return for picking up cigarettes, alcohol or groceries, the runner receives a tip of about a dollar or in some cases a drink, cigarette or food. Many of the people that act as runners are themselves alcoholics who use the money they earn to keep themselves supplied with liquor. Although many of the inner-city elderly who rely on go-fors can barely afford to, it is the only way that many of them can get their needs met. The existence of the go-for or runner role then is also a sad commentary on the social network of many inner-city elderly. Even among neighbours, one rarely does a favour for someone else. There is far too much mistrust in the inner-city to ask for a favour or to hope to be a recipient of one. To receive favours one must be willing to pay the price. Hochschild, on the other hand, found that within the housing project she studied, favours were frequently carried out among neighbours and even in situations where there was little or no reciprocity. "Three people helped to take care of Floyd, but since he was blind he could do little in return. Delia fixed his meals, Ernestine ironed his clothes and Fred shopped for his food" (Hochschild, 1973:53).

Not all of the men who play pool or cards at the drop-in play for money, but a substantial number do. "No point in playing then, if you're not going to put any money down." (Field notes: Max, October, 1989). There are also many who place bets on sporting events and horse racing. The bets are generally small, under two dollars usually. Also, betting activities are pursued to a greater extent at the beginning of the month, prior to one's cheque money running out.

Although hustling is a form of generating needed income, it is also considered by many to be a leisure-time pursuit. The measure of a good day is often subject to the number of bottles one has collected or the amount of money received in a sales transaction. Hustling is viewed not only as a way of getting by, but also as a way of passing time. Still, for most inner-city elderly, time continues to pass slowly, as the following section illustrates.

4.4 Now What Are You Supposed To Do With Your Life?

> I worked for twenty-two years. Machine Operator, ten hour days, and you worked hard too. When you stop working, there's not much for you to do. What are you supposed to do...when all you know how to do is your job? When it's gone...you just sit and wait to hear your number called (Field notes: Mike, August, 1989).

As many of the men pointed out to me, "We worked hard in them camps. There was no time for fun" (Field notes: Harry, May, 1989). The most 'fun' that they ever engaged in was usually in the form of playing cards, sitting around drinking coffee or sharing a bottle of something stronger. "When you work twelve-hour days at bush camps, you don't have a lot of time or energy left over" (Field notes: Al, Sept., 1989). Even if they had any energy left over after a day's heavy labour, there were few resources available in the work camps to enable them to either pursue or develop hobbies. These limitations have a dramatic effect on the current leisure patterns of many inner-city elderly.

> I worked outside all my life. That's what I like to do, be outside. Living here in the city drives me crazy. The community health nurse, she suggested I take up reading. Well, she brought me this book. I never got past the first few pages. I'm just not the reading type I guess (Field notes: John, July, 1989).

In the past, when the work was over at these camps, many of the men headed back into the city with quite a bit of cash and no one significant in their lives to come home to. So they generally partied until the next job assignment came up. Many would gravitate to the inner-city bars where they were guaranteed instant friendship. This past time continues. Frequenting bars as a primary form of leisure activity is a way to pass the time and one which is shared by many inner-city elderly "There's nothing else to do with your time. Except go to the legion and drink beer. I'm crippled, my back got broken in a mining camp, ten years ago. I can't work anymore" (Field notes: Bill, Oct., 1989). There were also several who pointed out that they go to the bars not only to pass time or to drink, but also to find some company. "It gets monotonous sometimes, just living one day after the next. Not much happens. Oh maybe go to the York for a beer, for the company more than anything else, I suppose" (Field notes: Henry, November, 1989).

A cook at a local coffee shop in the inner-city used these words to describe the inner-city elderly men that he knew: "These old guys, they just go from bar to bar, because they ain't got nothing to do, anywhere to be, anybody who cares....it's a shame, really it is" (Field notes: July, 1989). Although this account of inner-city elderly by a local businessman is a distressing one, it is unfortunately a realistic and accurate picture of what it is like for many who are old and living in our inner-city. The next section expands even further on what it must feel like to be old and alone in our society.

4.5 No One Respects You Anymore

As Gubrium (1973) points out, our society has been successful in prolonging the average lifespan, which ensures that an increasingly higher proportion of our population ultimately reach old age, but we have not ensured that old age will be dignified. It is extremely difficult for many elderly to maintain their sense of worth and dignity when they are stripped of their roles, particularly the role of productive worker, which is viewed in our society as being an essential requirement of being human. Retirement involves a loss of the role of worker, and this can have profound effects on an individual's confidence, feelings of self-worth and life satisfaction (Strauss, Aldrich & Lipman, 1976). The fact that many inner-city elderly can't work anymore takes away the only role that many of them had, and the toll this has on their self esteem can be easily anticipated. "No one respects you anymore when you get old. I used to be a foreman. I had respect from the guys. Now I can't work, I don't get any" (Field notes: Al, October, 1989).

Research into adjustment to retirement has provided considerable support for Burgess's (1960) contention that elderly face the prospect of playing a roleless role upon retirement. Once their work is completed, there is no other vital role to take its place; in fact, many express concern that their usefulness or productiveness dis-appears. Many of the men that I spoke to introduced themselves to me as miners, construction workers, camp cooks etc, even though they were no longer actively involved in these roles. Gubrium (1976) suggests that one way retirees maintain self-identification with their former occupational status is by stating that they are businessmen, plumbers, etc., despite their retirement. Retaining the title of their former trade is but one example of how the elderly men in the inner- city try to cope with the loss of their work roles.

As pointed out in an earlier section, forced retirement (due to illness, disability or work conditions) may involve an even greater loss of self-worth, since the action of retirement is being initiated from outside of the individual. "I used to do carpentry work, cabinets and all. I was forced to quit in '75, on account of arthritis. I miss working with my hands like that...I'm pretty well useless now" (Field notes: Ben, Sept., 1989). Many of the men I met, were indeed forced to retire and now must contend with feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth. Unfortunately, most struggle alone with these feelings, since few had opportunities to set down roots, considering the nature of their work histories. For most of the elderly men living in the inner-city, not only has retirement been difficult to adjust to, but it has also brought with it severe economic, physical and social restraints. Unlike their middle-class peers, who typically have more resources to prepare for retirement, many inner-city elderly without supplementary pensions have been unable to plan for their retirement and, as a result, now live in a severe state of poverty.

4.6 When You're All Alone

Since many of the men never lived in one place long enough, supportive and continuous relationships were hard to develop and sustain. "Never had my own furniture or bed until I moved in here. I was always out of town working. You couldn't be dragging furniture around with you. When you heard about work, you had to be ready to go" (Field notes: Jim, Nov., 1989). Most kept a single room in a boarding house or hotel within the inner-city while they were away working. Since there is a high degree of transience in the inner-city, even if they knew their neighbours when they left the city to take a job, there would invariably be new ones living there when they returned. There is also the fear of being exploited by others when you live in the inner-city. "Living in the inner-city, like I have, for most of my life...you end up being pretty much a loner, not that you want to be, but you have to be. You can't trust the guy that lives next door. It doesn't work that way, around here" (Field notes: George, May, 1989). Some men talked of strong relationships they built with others during their time in work camps, but then they also mentioned that it was rare to see that person again once the job was over.

Being away from home for extended periods of time obviously is also a strain on many marriages or relationships and certainly poses difficulties in fostering and maintaining ties with children, if one has any.

> "I guess with me being away working all the time, it wasn't much of a life for her. Maybe if we hadn't a split up, I wouldn't have become an alcoholic. Who knows how things would have turned out...one thing is for sure...it's too late to put it right now" (Field notes: Dick, Sept., 1989).

The majority of the men I met were either divorced or separated and retained little contact with their former spouses and, in some cases, their children. According to Laroche (1988), only about ten percent of inner-city elderly maintain even monthly contact with family. The following excerpt from my field notes reveals an all too often occurence:

> As I was walking towards the drop-in, Ernie waved me over to where he was sitting. "I have something I want to show you", he says as he pulls a tattered envelope out of his jean jacket

> pocket. "It's a birthday card from my daughter"....On the front there was the following inscription: To a wonderful father from your daughter, and inside it read: hoping your birthday is everything it should be, love Irene. "It's a nice card isn't it?" Ernie asked me. "Yes, it really is," I replied. She sent a picture of herself, too, as he fumbled in the envelope for a small black-and-white photo (the kind you get from photograph machines at airports)."She's really grown up, she has, I guess she'd be about twenty-five years old now...I haven't seen her since she was ten. She's very pretty...don't you think?" "Yes, Ernie, she has a very pretty face." As I handed the card and photo back to him, I innocently asked him when his birthday was? March 16th was his reply (Field notes: July, 1989).

For those men who never married, the reason they often gave was that they were away so often and their opportunities for work too unstable for family life. Research conducted by Operation Friendship indicates that twenty nine percent of the inner-city elderly population have always been single (Laroche, 1988). As one man pointed out,

> I didn't start out as a loner, but I guess you could say I ended up one...I've always been alone. I've had a few girlfriends off and on, but they didn't last. When I was up north working...lost a lot o' pretty gals over not being able to stay in one place long enough (Field notes: Jim, August, 1989).

Lack of family and family contact was also a prevalent theme of Hochschild's (1974) research into a lower-income seniors' housing project, although she found far more examples of people adopting one another in place of lost family members as a way of dealing with weakened or dissolved family ties. In the inner-city, there is much greater hesitancy to rely on one another for the intimate type of support that a family network can provide. One man that I met regarded his cat as his family "Me and Lilly we are a family. The two of us live here together. We don't get much company, so we make company for each other." (Field notes: Ted, June, 1989). When you live in a hostile environment such as the inner-city, having a pet you can count on and knowing it can't use you or hurt you may be the only way that some inner-city elderly can ease their loneliness.

4.7 COMMENT

The previous examples and stories of what it is like to be retired, to be without roles and respect, to be without adequate financial support and to be alone are all a testament to the theme presented at the beginning of this section. Aging is, after all, very much a social process unique for each individual. As this thesis attempts to illustrate, aging for all is not synonomous with sunsets, freedom and a sense of peace. For inner-city elderly, their current experiences of being old are anything but golden and their feelings about aging hardly pleasant. Their aging has been greatly influenced by the circimstances, situations and inequities of their pasts, and now they are just trying to hang on to what little is left for them.

In his ethnographic work of inner-city hotel dwellers, Bohannan (1976) highlights a pervasive lifestyle which he refers to as a retreat into anonymity: "They have renounced not only intimacy (and with it family relations and close friendships), they have also renounced many roles-particularly producer and worker, active citizen and community member" (p.146). Although Bohannan makes brief mention of systemic forces which *may have* contributed to their retreat into anonymity (i.e. traumatic and disruptive events during their lives which may have encouraged self-reliant behaviours), his analysis remains largely one of blaming the victims for their lots in life. The major difference in the interpretation of Bohannan's compared to my own is that he describes the renouncing of family, friendship, work roles and community member roles as being personal choice rather than personal consequence of situational factors or events.

The way our society is currently structured, most of us will eventually renounce the role of worker, just as generations of those before us have. As research has shown, successful adjustment to retirement is often determined by the extent to which this renunciation is based on personal choice. Many of the individuals that I spoke with felt cheated by retirement and saw it as something that happened to them as a result of injury or aging. Not only were their jobs taken away from them, but their self-worth was also dealt considerable and perhaps irreparable blows as well. Living the kind of nomadic lives that their work dictated also meant that few were able to develop or sustain family relations or friendships of any intimacy, let alone duration. Furthermore, once retired, these individuals were essentially left to fend for themselves with no financial security. It is no wonder that many are currently trying to figure out what "they're supposed to do now." Their experience of the retirement process is certainly vastly different from individuals who have financial resources, personal hobbies and individuals in their lives from whom they can seek support and companionship.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF DATA

5. THE INNER:CITY: WHERE THE RAGGED PEOPLE LIVE

This theme explores the characteristics of the inner-city neighborhood, what it is like to live in the inner-city, the kinds of social interaction common among inner-city elderly and a description of some of the leisure activities they are engaged in. The title of this theme, The Inner-City: Where The Ragged People Live, stems from a conversation I had with a twelve-year-old girl during the course of writing this thesis. She had asked me what I was writing about, and I told her the inner-city. She then replied: "Oh yeh, I know where the inner-city is. That's where all the ragged people live".

5.1 What You Want And What You Get...Are Two Different Things And The Sooner You Learn That, The Better Off You'll Be

According to Gubrium (1976), themes are the things one tells oneself and others as a natural means of categorizing experiences. Themes also tell others about one's identity or image of oneself. "I am a straw in the wind" or "My family is my life." Gubrium believes that the themes people express about themselves and their views of the world are very powerful pieces of data, since they communicate so much about an individual. Themes are also more easily and casually communicated. What follows is a collection of themes heard during my involvement with inner-city elderly, although they are unique, they are bound together by a common thread - resignation. That living in poverty perpetuates this feeling of resignation is clearly irrefutable and may also be, in some strange way, their only survival mechanism. While nearly everyone I spoke to shared the view that life in the inner-city was difficult, most individuals seemed to have developed some method of rationalizing their situations.

For instance, one man, when asked how conditions could be improved for seniors in the inner-city, replied that they couldn't, that there was nothing he, other seniors or government could do. "There comes a time in your life", he said, "when you just have to accept that what you want and what you get from life...are two different things and the sooner you find that out, the better off you'll be" (Field notes: Jack, June, 1989). When asked a similar question about conditions in the inner-city, another man replied: "That's the way the wind blows. You can't stop it or change its direction" (Field notes: Dick, July, 1989). "You learn to live with it. You can learn to live with anything if you have to" (Field notes: Dick, Nov., 1989).

Many are forced to cope with their situations by accepting them and have learned the hard way, that it is no use to try and change things. "I just take life day by day, I don't make plans, so I don't get let down. Whatever happens....happens, that's always been my motto." (Field notes: Lloyd, June, 1989). As was explored in the challenges to service provision section of the literature review, this fatalism or cynicism as a way of dealing with one's circumstances serves as an important survival function for those who live in inner-city neighbourhoods. At the same time, this prevalent theme of hopelessness is also an example of the extent to which societal conditions can eventually strip away an individual's strength and degree of control over one's life. In the final analysis, the survival mechanism of fatalism also serves to block the efforts of community development workers or helping pro-fessionals who are attempting to reform inner-city conditions and rejuvenate its residents. The challenge of empowering individuals who live in the inner-city will be further discussed in chapter six.

5.2 Poverty - It's No Way To Live

Poverty not only represents lacking essentials to sustain one's life (adequate food, housing, clothing, etc.), but it also denies individuals their dignity and acceptance in our so-called just society. During the course of my fieldwork, I went to a hospital to visit a man from the inner-city who had become sick. The nurse on duty at the time seemed surprised when I asked where I might find Joe, "Are you a social worker?, she asked and I replied "No, I'm a friend of his." "You're the only person to come and see him, that's all, I guess that's to be expected...I noticed from his chart that he's from the inner-city". Although poverty exists as **part** of our affluent society, the poor are often viewed as an isolated sub-culture, or worse, as "...an ineradicable condition that has congealed and hardened itself into a social syndrome" (Adams,1970:26) that everyone speculates about from time to time, but few really understand and or even attempt to.

Living in poverty entails struggling to meet basic needs. Needs such as food, shelter and clothing tend to consume many inner-city seniors' thoughts and energy. "I always save the bun from supper at the drop-in...then I know I have something to eat for lunch the next day" (Field notes: Mary, Aug., 1989). Few inner-city elderly can engage in the luxury of menu planning. Most are simply thankful for whatever food that is served at the drop-in or made available to them from the food bank. As for shelter, not only is it a struggle to find affordable housing ("I'm lucky, I got cheap rent, where I live - $185.00), it is also a struggle to survive in suites that have either crude or no cooking facilities (...the stove don't work in my place...hasn't worked since I moved in and that was last winter). Yet, shelter of any kind is still prized (...it's a dump, that's for sure, but it's better than being out on the streets, I tell ya") (Field notes: Oct., 1989). In the inner-city there is only a handful of government-subsidized housing units where rents are affordable and conditions are adequate and well maintained. "I got myself a real good place. It's one of those senior apartments, so it only costs a quarter of your pension. It's got carpeting and a bed. I got my own bathroom, with a round ball in the ceiling where hot water comes out" (Field notes: Art, July, 1989). Since Art had never lived in a place that had a working shower, he thought it was a modern invention! The majority are not so lucky. Most of the elderly in the inner-city are forced to live in sub-standard housing conditions. Yet, they wouldn't dream of complaining, for fear of having their rents raised, or worse, being evicted. "Sure the walls need painting, but if I ask him to paint the walls, my rent will go up...I'd rather have the paint peeling off the walls than pay more rent, besides this is one of the better places I've lived in" (Field notes: Oct., 1989) he says as he notices me looking around the room.

Individuals who live in rooming houses are in the most precarious situation, since they are not protected by the Landlord and Tenant Act and can be asked to leave without notice and for undue reason. The result is that many inner-city elderly are forced to accept their accommodation, for what it is - barely a shelter over their heads. As if inner-city elderly did not have enough to worry about, with finding shelter and food, adequate clothing, especially during winter months, is also a crucial need. It's minus twenty-three degrees Celsius and Bob walks into the drop-in: he is wearing a lightweight, tattered trenchcoat and underneath is the only wool sweater he owns; he has three layers of newsprint wrapped around his body in a futile attempt to provide additional insulation (Field notes: Jan. 1990). Out of approximately one hundred people who were at the drop-in on this cold winter evening, probably only a handful had sufficient winter jackets.

In the words of one inner-city elderly woman, "I'll say one thing...poverty - it's no way to live. I hope you never have to live like this" (Field notes: Anna, Sept., 1989). While these previous quotes attest to the fact that to be poor is to struggle, to go hungry, to be without adequate shelter or adequate clothing, the following quote illustrates the most inhuman aspect of poverty: to be poor in our society is to be invisible. "I think most people don't like to look at old bums like us, so they pretend that you are invisible... they look right through you when they pass you on the street" (Field notes: Al, July, 1989).

5.3 How Are You Supposed To Prevent Crime, When There Is No Lock On Your Door?

As if struggling to meet basic needs is not hard enough, inner-city elderly must also deal with victimization and crime, which are pervasive aspects of life in the inner-city. Over seven-hundred crimes were reported in the inner-city neighborhood by police during 1989. This figure does not include the crimes that went unnoticed (Edmonton City Police: Feb.,1990). Muggings and robberies are routine occurrences. While they cause considerable anxiety among the elderly people, they are viewed as an inexplicable part of life in the inner-city. "I always carry my money in my socks...that's the only safe place, if it's in your pocket...it'll be gone in a day or two...then you got nothing till the cheques come again" (Field notes: Stewart, Sept., 1989). "I had my cheque stolen again this month, in broad daylight. That's about the fifth time it's happened in the last two years. I'd say about ten old guys a month get rolled for their cheques" (Field notes: Jim, June, 1989). The threat of physical attack is always present, as one sixty year old woman explains: "The real reason I wear all these rings...is not to show off. They're fakes anyway...I wear them because they make a mighty good knuckle sandwich if I have to protect myself" (Field notes: Helen, Aug., 1989).

Not safe on the streets, neither are they safe in their rooms. It was stifling hot outside as well as inside Mary's two-room suite, "I keep the door and windows locked, even in the summer, on account of the burglars...I was broken into five times last year" (Field notes: Mary, Aug., 1989). Many inner-city elderly are not as fortunate as Mary to have locks on their doors or windows. Chances are, if there is a locking system for their suite, it has been broken and most likely not willingly repaired by the landlord. "There was this policeman at the drop-in, who told us the best way to prevent crime, is to keep your doors and windows locked, but how are you supposed do that, when the locks are busted?" (Field notes: Margaret, June 1989).

The fact that so many inner-city seniors experience victimization and have few resources to combat it provides just one more reason for their feelings of resignation or hopelessness. Due to inadequate housing stock and a high crime rate in their neighbourhood they have little chance of protecting themselves against violence and theft. At the same time, being able to live independently, even if it is in an inner-city neighbourhood where crime and victimization is inevitable, offers a measure of dignity and self-reliance which they do not want to give up, even if it would mean more comfortable accommodation and a safer environment.

5.4 At Least I'm Not Living In One Of Them Nursing Homes

"At least I'm not in one of them nursing homes" (Field notes: Archie, Oct., 1989). This theme in particular warrants some individual attention, since it was strongly voiced by most inner-city elderly. No matter how dismal their living, health, or economic conditions were, the majority of elderly that live in the inner-city still believe they are better off than those who live in nursing homes. Even a room without a toilet or cooking facilities in a dilapidated building is preferred over a bed in a nursing home. "I'd sooner take a gun and shoot myself, than live in one of them homes...where they tell you when you can and cannot get out of bed and when you have to eat" (Field notes: Archie, June, 1989). To enter a nursing home is tantamount to life being unequivocally over for many of the elderly people living in the inner-city. "Being put in a nursing home is like taking a dog to the pound. There's usually no coming back" (Field notes: Jack, Nov., 1989).

To manage for oneself, to make it alone, to re-affirm that one is a self-governing individual was of utmost importance to practically every individual I met.

> Sure, the nurses think I would be better off in a home, get regular meals and such, but I'm better off living downtown, everything is handy, I can come and go as I please and as for meals, I haven't been eating right for a long time. In fact I never did, never did have what you'd call good meals. Just any old thing is alright....I've lived this long ain't I ? (Field notes: Stewart, Aug. 1989).

Their need to remain on their own makes considerable sense, when you consider that many have suffered losses - jobs, families, friends etc. They desperately hang on to the one thing they do have left - their independence. Living on their own, although difficult to do, is their way of maintaining at least some control over their lives. Although most are powerless to improve their living conditions or the amount of income they receive, they pride themselves for being able to live on their own, no matter how inadequate their shelters are.

Perceiving themselves as self-reliant is often the only positive feature they attribute their own self image. "One thing I'll say for myself: I never needed to rely on anyone, I've always managed, even during tough times to look after myself" (Field notes: Willy, June, 1989). Living in an environment where prostitution, drug addiction and pedalling, theft and brutality (in some cases resulting in murder) are daily occurrences, it was at times amazing that the elderly people I met were able to survive, especially considering the fact that many were experiencing declining health and reduced mobility. The threat of ending up in a nursing home is one that most of them fight. What is necessary for survival, though, is to maintain their self-reliance and avoid dependence by not relying on others, which means that many must, in their struggle, also sacrifice their needs for intimacy.

-The Social World

5.5 You Gotta To Be Your Own Best Friend

"I don't have any real friends here. I don't want to get thick with these guys; they'll just be prying into my life....I don't need that kind of trouble" (Field notes: Jack, July, 1989). There are few examples that portray the inner-city as being a close-knit community, or any sense that people who live in the inner-city share a feeling of "we're all in this together." As one rooming-house resident put it: "I'd say most of us keep to ourselves pretty well. There's the odd one or two that are friends I guess...I don't take much notice of the other guys who live in my building" (Field notes: Lloyd, Aug., 1989). Many of the people that I met, while they often lived in close proximity to other seniors (in rooming houses or apartment suites), preferred to maintain a certain level of emotional or social distance from one another. Stephens (1976) attributes this reluctance to become socially involved with others to the roughness of inner-city life. Although conditions in Edmonton's inner-city (especially crime and poverty) certainly affect the degree of trust and level of involvement among individuals, for many a lack of close personal relationships also appears to be a continuation of the pattern of non-involvement with others due to their work and the lifestyle they were used to living. Since many have a past that included leaving their family or friends or being left by them, entering or getting involved in new relationships is a risky venture. As one of the staff at Operation Friendship pointed out, "Most don't get involved in relationships. They don't trust others or don't believe that they themselves deserve to be trusted or loved" (Field notes: Sept., 1989).

Many feel the less they share about themselves and the less others share with them, the better off they will be. "We used to be friends, until she started spreading stories about me...the things I had told her about myself were private...you just can't trust people around here with your secrets. It's better to keep your mouth shut" (Field notes: Helen, Nov., 1989). "You're your own best friend, like I say. You got to look after yourself, around here. It's everyone for himself" (Field notes: Willy, Aug., 1989).

Living in the inner-city, they are surrounded at all times by potential exploiters, for example, shopkeepers who charge higher-than-average prices for their goods; landlords who do not repair suites, but charge high rents regardless; people who rob them of their cheques in broad daylight. "You can't trust no one here, I tell you...that's the way it is, there's only yourself and you don't owe nothing to nobody" (Field notes: Charlie, Dec., 1989). It seems that by restricting their involve-ment with each other, they can protect themselves from vulnerability, dependence on others and ultimately the fear of being exploited by others. "I'm cautious about who I go with...mostly I go it alone" (Field notes: George, Sept., 1989).

Because everyone who lives in the inner-city is so needy even those with more resources cannot afford to help others too much. "You just can't afford to be open to others, to help out your neighbour...that kind of stuff, you do it once for one person, and you'll be doing it for everyone, you'll get used up and never survive" (Field notes: Graham, Oct., 1989). As Liebow describes in his discussion of challenges as participant-observer in an inner- city setting, "Some exploited me, not as an outsider but rather as one who, as a rule, had more resources than they did. When one of them came up with resources, a car, money - he too was exploited in the same way" (1967:253).

In some cases, it is the mentally ill person that ends up getting exploited in the truest sense of the word. While most of the mentally ill persons that I met were indeed very lonely, some enjoyed (or endured) the company of others by giving them food, a place to sleep or, as the following example depicts, the use of a TV in exchange for some attention."Bill comes by my place almost every night of the week. He doesn't have his own TV, so I let him watch mine...he's company. He's the only one who ever comes over...I usually buy him a half litre of ice cream, chocolate" (Field notes: Leo, July, 1989). Fear of exploitation leads to a general lack of confidence in others, which results in individuals isolating themselves from each other as their only means of survival. It appears that the ability to isolate oneself from others is viewed as an important and highly valued skill, one that not everyone, particularly the mentally ill, are capable of.

5.6. Instant Friendship - Just Pour And Serve

Although close or intimate friendships were seldom seen to exist among inner-city elderly, there is one form of relationship that, while short lived, does seem to provide for a certain degree of affection. The kind of relationship being referred to will be labelled as "instant friendship," for lack of a better term. It is attractive mainly because it carries with it no commitment or long-term expectations. Instant friendship in the context of the inner-city refers to "drinking buddies," who invariably tended to be just that, buddies until the booze ran out, or until a fight broke out over who bought the last bottle or who drank more than their share. For example, one week Tom introduced Bill as his best buddy in the world, and then the next week, when I asked where his buddy Bill was, Tom replied "...that son of a bitch, good for nothing, he stole ten bucks from me. He's no buddy of mine" (Field notes: Tom, May, 1989). As Stephens (1976:31) comments in her ethnographic work of elderly male residents of an inner-city hotel, "While some of the men preferred to drink alone, others had drinking companions. These drinking companions parted company once outside the bar, their relationships did not survive beyond the common interest of drinking".

Alcohol or the money to purchase alcohol, then, is seen as a resource by some inner-city elderly. When it evaporates, so too does the relationship in most cases. "Instant friendships" or drinking relationships are also significant social-world phenomenon of this population, in the sense that, for many inner-city males, these types of relationships typified their working years, as was discussed in an earlier section of this thesis. The tendency among those that worked out of town for long periods of time was to gravitate to inner-city bars when they returned to the city and there they were able to find, at least temporarily, some social connection to others.

5.7 What Are Friends For?

The most typical type of relationship observed among inner-city elderly is one in which there is a mutual sharing of resources or at least the potential to share resources. For example, one does another's grocery shopping in return for some free food for themselves or for a monetary reward. This particular finding is similar to that of Stephens (1976:8), who stated "I found little co-hesiveness among the people at Guinevere, the social bonds that did exist were impoverished and their primary function appeared to be the attainment of goods and services". In the inner-city, those with the least amount of resources (money, a place for others to crash at, food, alcohol, a car) are often the loneliest and the ones with the fewest friends. That the relationships observed among the inner-city elderly in this study were found to be mainly instrumental is not so surprising, since their ability to survive hinges on the mobilization of limited resources. "Friends are {good only} for money" (Field notes: Charlie, Oct., 1989).

As the Director of Operation Friendship summarized during a feedback session in which I had shared with him my interpretations of the types of friendships I had observed, "Your understanding and analysis of the social interactions is fascinating and seems right on...about the deepest analysis I've ever done about the relationships among the people is to say that the friendships are weird" (Field notes: Sept., 1989). Generally speaking, interactions among people and the relationships they tend to form are for the most part very shallow. The instant friendship pattern which revolves around the activity of drinking is an extreme example of male friendships which are dominated by activity rather than expression. This lack of emotional intimacy in friendships (although more common among the men) was also found to exist in the relationships among women who live in the inner-city. A couple of times a week, three to five women would meet together at the drop-in for coffee, yet their conversations were generally devoid of personal or private accounts. In particular, details of their pasts were considered to be a very private matter. Occasionally, when I was visiting with a woman on a one-to-one basis, personal stories were sometimes shared, but only with the strict instruction that I keep what they told me in confidence. Comments like, "I've never told anyone this before..." or "No one around here knows about my past..." The two main themes related to social interaction which evolved from my observations are that friendships, when they do exist, are highly susceptible to change and dissolution, and that social ties are mainly formed to sustain one's physical vs emotional needs.

5.8 The Drop-In Centre - A Place Where Loners Can Go

In summary, the social world that exists at the drop-in centre is significantly less cohesive than the one that Hochschild (1973) describes in her research of a low-income housing project. Hochschild found numerous examples of ways in which people helped one another and looked out for one another. She also observed persistent social pressures toward sociability. "Those residents who chose not to socialize or beome involved in activities were viewed as deviant by the rest. The consensus seemed to be that 'they' could be more sociable if they wanted" (Hochschild, 1973:93). Whereas at the inner-city drop-in, there is less pressure to socialize or get involved in activities. As one staff member of Operation Friendship suggested,

> I think that a lot of inner-city seniors come to our drop-in because there is not too much structure, there are few obligations, no one to say whether they can belong or not; there's no threat to sitting and having a cup of coffee and checking the place out (Field notes: Sept. 1989).

Loners, and there are many elderly in the inner-city who profess to be, are generally able to find their own space and a level of acceptance from staff and other members. "I guess one reason why I like this place so much is that you can just sit and drink coffee, watch other people. You don't get bugged by the staff to do stuff and you don't have to talk to no one, unless you feel like it" (Field notes: Lloyd, July, 1989). Individuals who are used to a lifestyle of minimum social contact enjoy coming to the drop-in mainly to watch others. "I lived for a while with my daughter in Millwoods. I was living there for free, but I came back here (the inner-city drop-in), I guess I missed it. I don't really have any friends here. I just missed the comings and goings on around here" (Field notes: Karl, Oct., 1989).

The primary purpose of the drop-in, as stated in the agency's brochure, is to provide inner-city seniors with a safe gathering place where they can socialize, develop friendships, become a part of the community and have access to information and services. These are important characteristics, since the inner-city neighbourhood is one of impersonality, mistrust and fear. The drop-in is seen by the staff as one of the few places in the inner- city where individuals like Betty, who is a well known "bag lady" can come and find some measure of acceptance and be treated like the human being she is. Also the drop-in does provide a safe haven from victimization and crime, and this safety is vitally important to the inner-city elderly.

Certainly the staff at the drop-in centre make every effort to provide a setting or context for socialization, however, the social forces within the inner-city, are also continually at work to strip people of potential relationships and needs for intimacy. These structural constraints may, in the final analysis, be too powerful to overcome solely by provision of a drop- in centre. Here, again, it is evident with social forces being so strong, that professional intervention in the improvement of the quality of lives of inner-city elderly, if it is going to work, must recognize and seek to change also the environment rather than focusing solely on the individual.

5.9 The Role Of The Hierarchy - At Least I Got All My Marbles

One of the goals of my research was to develop a descriptive and analytical picture of the social world of inner-city elderly. Two questions that guided this exploration were: "What kind(s) of social interaction exists?" and

"To what degree does it (or does it not) provide meaning to their lives?" Observing and learning about the kinds of interactions and relationships that exist among among inner-city elderly and between the elderly and their service providers was a complex task with an equally complex outcome.

From observing the rigid hierarchy that exists in the inner-city, it appears to serve an important function for those at the higher levels, mainly that of enabling them to preserve their image of themselves and possibly even to inflate their self esteem. "The skid row man can protect himself from respectables who reject him, by claiming that their standards are incorrect. But when he looks around at other skid row men, his own standards force him to reject many of his peers." In order to survive, "He must cling to the belief that he is not as 'defective' as those about him" (Bahr, 1973:288). Expressing outrage over a mentally ill person's behaviour is one way of establishing and maintaining a position of higher rank for oneself. "Take that guy, for instance. He's a real fruit cake...he talks to thin air, like he's having a conversation with someone. He shouldn't be allowed to come in here at all...He oughta be locked up" (Field notes: Graham, May, 1989). These type of statements not only communicate one's superiority, but also serve to maintain the rigid hierarchy that permeates the inner-city. At the same time, distinguishing oneself as superior to others is one way in which some inner-city elderly are able to construct and maintain a level of self-respect which is otherwise difficult to find.

5.10 Learning Who's Who On The Inner City Ladder

There is clearly a hierarchy in place in the inner-city. "Mental Cases", "Nuts" or "those people who ain't right" are at the very bottom, then Native Indians, then drunks and then the "straight people," generally people who may be poor or down and out, but they don't start brawls, drink heavily or exhibit strange behaviours. Those who are straight or mainstream in terms of the inner-city context, however, lose this status position when they venture beyond the inner-city limits. When they enter a store or restaurant outside of the inner-city, they are stared at or refused service because they smell badly or are dressed in ragged or dirty clothes. Visiting other senior citizens' centres outside of the inner-city also re-inforces the lack of status the poor elderly have among mainstream elderly. "A group of us went to a dance at a seniors centre. They put us all at one table in the corner and then said things like: wasn't it nice you could come... it's lovely that you have a chance to get out of downtown" (Field notes: Margaret, Sept., 1989). As one of the staff of Operation Friendship pointed out, it is difficult for inner- city elderly to gain acceptance from the mainstream elderly population that frequent the senior citizens' centres in other parts of the city. "Nick likes to paint, so I tried to get him involved at a senior's centre, they (the seniors) wouldn't have anything to do with him" (Field notes: Feb., 1989).

Examples of the inner-city hierarchy can be found in the seating arrangements at the drop-in and also in the order of the line up for meals. The 'straight' people sit against the far wall of the drop-in. Their table, because it is placed horizontally while the other tables are in vertical rows, has the best view of everyone in the drop-in. The set-up is reminiscent of a head table at a banquet or formal function. Many of the people that regularly sit at the head table are long-time members who feel it is their duty to patrol who sits at their table. Much fuss is made when a "mental case," "Native Indian" or "drunk" attempts to take a place at their table. Sometimes, depending on who is already sitting at the head table, the un-welcome guest will be barely tolerated; that is they will be allowed to stay and eat their meal at the table, but no one will speak to the individual. When the meal is finished and the individual has left, the rest of those at the head table will complain bitterly about how rank the person smelled or how strangely the person behaved. On most occasions, however, the individuals in question do not even get an opportunity to remain at the table. Someone from the head table will inevitably inform them that they are sitting in someone's seat and tell them to find a seat at another table.

At the drop-in, meals are served cafeteria-style, as soon as the clock strikes five-thirty, people begin to form a line to the left of the kitchen, and they are served their meal by staff and volunteers. The meal includes a meat dish, potatoes or rice, vegetables, a fresh green salad and a dinner roll. Although everyone must line up for meals and it is supposedly done table by table, Native Indians, those who are mentally ill and those who are inebriated generally end up being last in line, which often means that there is no meat or salad left.

The hierarchy is also evident in the discussions among old-time members of the drop-in who complain that "The drop-in has gone downhill, now they let in anybody and everybody, drunks coming in and starting fights and they stink the place up because they haven't had a bath in two years" (Field notes: Graham, July, 1989). "Or the mental cases, there's more of them around now too, I think, they should have their own drop-in" (Field notes: Ray, July, 1989).

When friendships form, they are usually among individuals in the same class or place on the ladder. Only on rare occasions would friendships or ties form which crossed the boundaries of the rigid hierarchy. In some cases, the relationships were mainly token ones, "Well, I let him sit beside me at the drop-in even though he is crazy because he's got to sit somewheres. It's not like we're friends or anything" (Field notes: Harry, Sept., 1989). In another instance, the relationship between a straight person and a "mental case" showed a degree of genuine caring.

> I made friends with Hazel, everyone told me not to bother with her: she's a mental case. But she needs somebody. Sure, she is pretty crazy, but even crazy people get lonely. The way I see it...is we all got our problems. Some just have them more severe like (Field notes: Anna, Aug., 1989).

However, expressing sympathy, or in some cases even empathy with mentally ill persons was something that the mainstream or straight members of the drop-in did not engage in often.

-Leisure Experiences

5.11 First Things, First...

"First you gotta find a place to sleep, something to eat. Then you can worry about how you're going to spend your time" (Field notes: George, May, 1989). I realized very quickly that the two questions that I had started with, "Where does leisure take place?" and "What do inner-city elderly do for leisure?," were almost totally inadequate in gaining an understanding of leisure in the inner-city. First of all, the phenomenon of leisure cannot be divorced from its cultural context, nor can it be understood without serious reflection. Any exploration of leisure needs and experiences of inner-city elderly must be prefaced with a discussion of attaining basic needs and what it takes to fulfill these needs. For most, a great deal of physical energy, mental energy and economic resources goes into finding and maintaining shelter, adequate clothing and food. It is only after these needs are addressed that most can even begin to contemplate, let alone engage in, leisure pursuits. Leisure, then, is secondary to survival.

In addition to the struggle to meet basic needs, the lack of safety in the inner-city for elderly and the amount of crime that takes place against the elderly are further powerful barriers to leisure participation. Most elderly women and, in fact, several elderly men as well, do not venture outside in the evening. Although an evening meal is served at the drop-in through out the year, the attendance, particularly by women, declines during the winter months due to shorter daylight hours. As one woman explained to me early in September, "This will be my last visit here for supper, until next spring, I'll miss it, but I never go out in the dark. It's just not safe". (Field notes: Edna, Sept., 1989). Another man explains, "I used to like to play darts at the legion on Wednesday nights but after getting beat up and rolled for ten dollars... I don't go out at night anymore" (Field notes: Henry, Oct., 1989). Still for others, a hobby which they enjoy can also suffer due to the amount of crime in the inner-city neighborhood, "I used to do quite a bit of painting, but I had my canvasses and paints stolen so many times...I had to give it up. I just can't afford to keep buying new supplies. Sometimes I draw on the paper plates I collect from the garbage" (Field notes: Nick, Aug., 1989). Fear of victimization is a very strong and real barrier that prevents both elderly women and men who live in the inner- city, from visiting public places at night and thus keeps them from pursuing or developing hobbies and friendships. It has been found that victimization rates are higher for elderly who are poor, who live alone, who are physically disabled, who live in the central cores of large cities, and for those that live in public housing developments (Balkin, 1979). In addition, elderly who run the highest risk of victimization are those that are more socially disadvantaged; that is, they live in or near neighbourhoods with high crime rates; they are more dependent on walking and public transportation, which increases chances of street assault, and they live and walk alone (Yin, 1980). Since all of these factors are in operation in the inner-city, victimization and crime are an even greater barrier to community involvement and quality of life for the seniors who live in the inner-city than they are for seniors who live in suburban neighbourhoods. As Balkin (1979) suggests, many elderly who live in inner-city centers become essentially self-exiled prisoners in their own communities.

5.12 When The Cheques Come In

Life in any type of setting is bound to have discernible rhythms. One rhythm which was incredibly dominant in this setting, and has significance for leisure, since leisure activities are generally only pursued once basic needs have been met, was the two to three-day period at the end of each month, when the cheques came in. Often, without even looking at a calendar, I was able to recognize whether or not it was cheque time based on the mood of people and their activities. About a week before the cheques are due to arrive there are certainly more squabbles, fights and flaring of tempers at the drop-in centre. Hustling activities are often pursued to a greater degree. Requests for loans of money or food increase drastically. People often appear more on-edge and pre-occupied. Then, during the last three days or so each month, the mood definitely swings to one of excitement. "I'd say that life revolves around our cheques, no two ways about it" (Field notes: Frank, Sept., 1989). Not only is there much talk about the arrival of the cheques, 'Are they in yet?, Did you get yours yet?, Did you see them arrive yet?", there is a festival-like quality in the air which I can only compare to the type of enthusiasm generated in anticipation of a much-awaited and celebrated event. This "high" can last anywhere from a week to two weeks after the cheques arrive. Slowly, though, it wears off as the money runs out, and even taking the bus to the drop-in three times a week becomes an almost unaffordable luxury once again.

5.13 The Playing Of Games

While bingo is a common activity which occurs regularly in seniors' centres across the city, the difference at Operation Friendship is in the prizes. At the drop-in, every weekday at four o'clock people play bingo in earnest, for a can of tomato soup, a bottle of shampoo or a loaf of bread. Most of the time, items won at bingo are not only much appreciated; they are badly needed. As illustrated in the following comment made by a man who had just won two cans of ravioli, "It's about time I won something, now at least I can eat" (Field notes: Martin, Sept., 1989). Sometimes people (usually those without cooking facilities) will attempt to make money by selling what they have won playing bingo: "Will you give me a dollar for this can of stew" or try to trade their winnings for cigarettes or some other item, such as a hat or pair of gloves.

Pool and card playing are probably the most popular recreational activities that the elderly are involved with at the drop-in centre. Card playing, in particular, is an activity that most of the men engaged in during their stints in bush camps throughout the province. "Even though we had to start work at 6:00 a.m., some nights we'd stay up 'till one or two in the morning playing crib. I still play a lot of crib" (Field notes: Harry, Sept., 1989). It is also not uncommon to wager small bets, usually in the amount of twenty-five cents or so, on the outcome of a game of cards or pool. Again, this provides further evidence for the fact that survival is always on the minds of inner-city elderly and any strategy for obtaining even a small amount of money is often pursued.

5.14 Passing Time

When the weather is mild, most of the benches in front of Operation Friendship are bound to be occupied by those wanting to watch others or those looking for a little company. "I like to sit here. It's a good bench, you get a good view of everything from here" (Field notes: Henry, Sept.,1989). For those who like to sit around and talk, the topics of interest most often revolve around events (the informal ones) taking place at the drop-in. 'Who did or didn't get their cheque yet, who got beat up, who owes who money, whether he or she is going down hill and will likely end up in a nursing home, who had a woman in their room that night" etc. are all likely subjects for discussion.

Outings to parks or local attractions, although not regular occurrences, are occasionally enjoyed by a few seniors. "One man that came with us to the zoo said he hadn't been there for forty years...he had a really good time." Generally speaking, the outings are rarely planned in advance, since most don't like to commit themselves too far in advance. This particular issue will be further explored in chapter six, under the sub-heading of 'The Un-management Of Leisure'. Suffice it to say that usually the staff play it by ear, if the weather is good, or something interesting is happening in the city, they will casually invite whomever is around to go on an outing. Activities are rarely, if ever, consciously or systematically planned. In this sense the drop-in centre is unlike any other senior drop-in centre in the city, which tend to be characterized by their highly structured and well-planned monthly calenders of social events, trips and entertainment.

5.15 Comment

The context of the inner-city and the lifestyles of the elderly who live there appear to strongly influence not only the service approach when it comes to leisure, but also what is viewed and experienced as leisure. During the course of my field work, the so-called recreation programmer at the drop-in centre often made comments like the following: "Getting these seniors to go on outings, is like pulling teeth." It seemed obvious to her and to me as well that the majority of inner-city elderly were mainly disinterested in going on outings, even when they were given the chance of choosing the destination. One explanation for this dislike or disinterest in outing activities may stem from the fact that going on outings has never been a part of their lifestyles nor an expression of leisure they are accustomed to or one with which they can identify. This clearly points to the importance of service providers and fieldwork researchers being sensitive to their clients' interpretation and expression of leisure. Assuming a middle-class opinion or expression of recreation and expecting that to make sense to individuals who have not been exposed to similar attitudes and experiences is simply asking for failure. In addition, being ignorant of a clients' frame of reference when it comes to leisure means that, as a service provider, you may never discover the structural constraints that many inner-city elderly experience.

As the section on aging, class and leisure in the literature review pointed out, your environment and resources play a significant role not only in the interpretation or meaning you give to leisure, but also it affects your ability to experience or engage in certain expressions of leisure. Therefore, any development of services or programs to meet the leisure needs of inner-city elderly must address not only their personal histories and lifestyles but also the barriers they face. Improving opportunities for increased social contact and the development of leisure pursuits among elderly individuals who live in the inner-city can only come about through a combination of assessment of their interests and an attack on the structural forces that inhibit their abilities and resources to pursue leisure. These challenges and some possible solutions will be further discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS: RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF INNER-CITY ELDERLY

6.1 Having A Certain Philosophy Helps...

Operation Friendship is not geared in any way to rehabilitation, but rather towards presenting seniors with alternatives to improve their own quality of life at their own initiative. The staff of Operation Friendship prefer to focus on rejuvenation instead of rehabilitation, which is used by so many inner-city agencies. Rejuvenation means being agents of support and facilitation, as opposed to being agents of change who try and convert individuals into what the staff think they could or should become. The main mandate of Operation Friendship is not to save people, but rather to help provide some of the basic building blocks of life such as food, shelter, clothing and a secure and safe place to gather. "We, as an organization, believe that by offering a safe and supportive environment, our clients will be able to find the stability and security they need to help themselves" (Field notes: O.F. staff, Sept., 1989).

6.2 What Does Self-Help Really Mean?

MEETING PHYSICAL/HEALTH/DAILY LIVING NEEDS

A considerable amount of energy and time is spent in meeting the health-related needs of the their elderly clientele. This usually entails arranging for people to receive daily living aids such as glasses, hearing aids or canes. Many individuals who are helped by the agency's staff lack the income or knowledge of resources to obtain these items for themselves. Approximately eighty percent of Operation Friendship's work takes place in the community, reaching out to the seniors who need a variety of the services mentioned.

HANDLING THE RED TAPE

One of the regular tasks which staff perform for members of Operation Friendship is obtaining necessary forms for income assistance, medical insurance etc. and assisting in their completion. In many cases, because staff are familiar with benefits available, they can help to make a difference in the amount of money or advantage a client receives. "They (staff) really helped me out...they got me receiving my veteran's pension, brought me the forms and all... Before that, all I got was the government cheque" (Field notes: Stewart, Sept., 1989). In some cases, people were aware of benefits they were entitled to, but were unable to complete the necessary paper work due to little or no ability to read or to the sheer complexity of the form.

6.3 Trying To Change The Bigger Picture - Putting Our Philosophy Into Action Is Not Always Easy

Not only is Operation Friendship geared to responding to the immediate needs of inner-city elderly, they are also concerned with trying to change the bigger picture, that is, systemic forces that affect the quality of life for many inner-city elderly. As Melchers (1976) points out, "An advocate association can no longer measure its success by the number of services it provides, but by the social reform it initiates to improve the lives of disadvantaged persons". Responding to the plight of inner-city elderly requires not only money to provide services, but also, perhaps more importantly, it requires being prepared to raise broader social issues instead of just bandaging the wounded. This focus tends to run against the grain of what many people believe to be the purpose of a social service agency. As one of the workers at Operation Friendship pointed out: "A social service agency is not supposed to fight against the status quo. We are supposed to do low-level campaigning. We're certainly not expected to apply pressure to the economic or political structures" (Field notes: O.F. staff, Sept., 1989). This is also an example of the difference between a traditional social work perspective, one which sees problems as stemming from the individual, and a radical perspective, which sees problems as stemming mainly from the social structure or context. One major way in which Operation Friendship works to improve societal conditions for inner-city elderly is in the form of committees: all of the staff are on at least one local activist committee working successfully in areas such as pension reform, housing standards, health benefits, social planning, social service benefits and transportation. Clearly the inner-city is an area where radical social work efforts are not only needed, but may be the most effective way to put pressure on the political and economic forces which perpetuate conditions in the inner city.

Day to day, however, being a self-help agency seeking to support inner-city elderly as well as reform social conditions presents an uphill climb.

As one of the staff explained, Operation Friendship started in 1969 as a grass-roots, small drop-in centre. Since then, their budget has grown, they've added more structure (programs, staff, new building) and perhaps most importantly they must continue to address a seemingly increasing number of clients. As caseloads grow and social issues beg for advocacy, it is not surprising that the staff, at times, feel overwhelmed by the day-to-day tasks involved in helping the inner-city elderly.

On a more personal level, self-help also requires the professional to be able to step back and let people make their own choices, which can be a difficult challenge.

> We will help people make changes in their lifestyles, if that's what they want. Sometimes people will make choices that we might not agree with, such as abusing lysol, but other than informing them of the consequences of their choices, we really cannot do much else (Field notes: O.F. staff, Oct., 1989).

Believing in letting people make their own choices is a key element of the self-help approach. At the same time, this can be difficult to do, when the choices that others make reflect values that are different from your own. As one of the staff of Operation Friendship suggested, "We have to remind ourselves to focus on what the clients think they need, not what we think they need" (Field notes: O.F. staff, June, 1989). One example of Operation Friendship's concern with understanding their clients needs and not mis-interpreting them can be found in the introduction to their needs assessment study, Forgotten Pioneers. The introduction states that one of the main reasons for initiating the study was to assess whether or not the organization had a good understanding of the needs of their clients, instead of just assuming that they knew what people needed or wanted. One of the main goals of the study was to determine whether Operation Friendship had a clear understanding of the current needs and issues facing inner-city elderly. Second, it sought to determine whether the services they were providing actually responded to client needs and problems, rather than carrying out established program mandates for their own sake. As the author of the study eloquently points out:

> While I don't deny that Operation Friendship does have considerable experience and expertise in its field, I firmly believe that we must challenge what we know, or what we think we know, on a regular basis. It is too easy for any organization to get into a rut regarding how they view their clientele, which ultimately is a disservice to the people that the organization means to help (Holmgren, 1989: iv).

Another problem in translating philosophy into action can often exist in the area of recruitment of staff and volunteers. According to the Executive Director of Operation Friendship there is a tendency for "Mother Teresa" types to want to work in the inner-city. Although compassion is a valuable trait, workers or volunteers who try to save those who live in the inner-city or take up their problems for them end up becoming less effective in their jobs as helpers, partly because compassion is not always wanted and partly because they take on so much that they eventually burn out. A second type of worker that Operation Friendship tries to avoid is the professional social worker, "These are the worst for our organization. They are too bent on confronting and changing people to be what they expect them to be. Most of our clients put enough pressures on themselves. We don't need to place more on them" (Field notes: O.F. staff, Sept., 1989). These descriptions portray elements of both the charity and professional approaches to helping. Between these two extremes lies the kind of worker that Operation Friendship needs for its survival. The kind of individual that Operation Friendship seeks is one who has both a theoretical understanding of self-help or community development as well as someone who has some skills in this type of helping. At the same time, it is important that the individual is able to keep the broader picture in mind, even though they must deal daily with individuals' crises and problems. This does not mean that the agency looks for callous or cold people. What it means, according to the Executive Director, is that they search for people who are strongly committed to social change, have good personal support systems to deal with the stresses of the job, are non-judgemental and who believe that, in the long run, working with rather than for people is the most effective way to empower others. While it can be difficult to find suitable staff and volunteers, the Executive Director also pointed out that not all staff who currently work at the agency have the same level of sophistication when it comes to service approach. Some simply do a better job of helping through empowering than others, and this means that sometimes the philosophy of self-help is not always practised by all staff, even though it may be the service approach of the agency.

6.4 How Operation Friendship Works To Counteract Systemic Forces: Reducing Alienation

As discussed in the service delivery section of the literature review, the self-help approach is generally only meaningful when the individuals and institutions concerned feel that they have some degree of control over the factors that affect their own destiny. It was also pointed out within the previous section, that the majority of elderly who live in the inner-city, feel, in fact, that they have little or no control over their situations. Some of this apathy or alienation stems from never being listened to or never taken seriously by large bureaucratic helping organizations. Therefore, if Operation Friendship is going to be successful in the self-help approach they need to attempt to reduce the belief among the inner-city elderly that they are powerless and that their actions are meaningless. According to one staff member, they have had to start small,

> We don't suggest they go down to the legislature and put on a protest. No one would show up, because they don't believe it would make any difference. What we do is focus on the smaller kinds of enabling. Giving people the opportunity to talk about their lives, their ex-periences...or, for instance, at the drop in we try to set up postives for people, roles and activities that they can do and can get some sense of self-satisfaction from, to feel better about themselves (Field notes: O.F. staff, October, 1989).

As the manual of Operation Friendship states, seniors are encouraged to get involved in every aspect of the drop-in to enhance their self-esteem and to show that they can make a difference. As was stated in the introduction to this thesis, the whole philosophy that holds Operation Friendship together is the fundamental belief that people should have the opportunity to be of service to other human beings.

6.5 Raising Self-Esteem Through The Provision Of Roles

The old in our society represent the obsolete, the cast off and cast out. The old are perceived as expendable in a society geared towards progress, innovation and change. Old people are devalued by the young and this view is then internalized by old people themselves. As one older man described to me, "I'd give anything to be young again...your life means something when you're young. When you get to be my age (seventy one) there's not a heck of a lot to live for - just breathing and sleeping day after day" (Field notes: Archie, November, 1989). Who's responsible for this lack of status that so many of our older adults experience? Stephens (1976) blames the rapid technological and industrial revolution for our "lost generation" of old people. In the years since they occupied important work roles, the dimensions of our society have changed in major ways. While progress has rendered some of their skills obsolete, for others their physical abilities to work or be productive have been lost due to the strenuous nature of the work that they carried out for most of their lives. They truly are a lost generation living in a culture which has created them, yet has not taken strides to include them or incorporate them now that they can no longer work.

Voluntarism, although not the only answer, is one viable option for our lost generation. For example, volunteer roles at the drop-in centre help to provide status to a particular group of people known to experience little in our society, because of their age, their lack of involvement in work roles and their position on the socio-economic ladder. Some of the seniors who live in the inner-city do volunteer at Operation Friendship, helping to prepare meals, calling bingo, or organizing special events such as clothing sales, running errands etc. For the most part, they take their roles seriously and find much gratification in their work. "I've been doing volunteer work here in the kitchen for as long as I can remember. I like helping out here, it gives me something to do and I feel like I'm helping others" (Field notes: Sam, Aug., 1989). The importance of having a role to fulfill is crucial to the mental health of many of the volunteers, "If I don't come to volunteer for a few days, if I just stay at home, I get depressed staring at the four walls...it's no good; I start to feel sorry for myself. I have to get out and do something" (Field notes: Frank, July, 1989). Volunteer roles provided by Operation Friendship help to combat the powerful forces that threaten to erode our seniors' sense of self-esteem, confidence and feelings of productiveness.

Flexibility, however, is the key to the success of the volunteer program at Operation Friendship. While other seniors drop-in centres run strictly by calender and clock time, phone lists and committees, Operation Friendship's Volunteer Co-ordinator takes a very different and unique approach,

> We generally let people flow in/out of volunteer roles, based on how they feel at the time, what their needs are. Sometimes that means things get a little chaotic, but most of our seniors would resent the imposed scheduling and timetabling often associated with voluntarism (Field notes: O.F. staff, July, 1989).

This is an extremely important point which reflects not only the agency's responsiveness to the individuals they serve, but also the broader issue that voluntarism itself must take on a different structure and culture depending on the people that it is attempting to be of benefit to.

6.6 At Least At Operation Friendship You Are A Person, Not A File Number

Attempting to provide roles to seniors who have none is one aspect of Operation Friendship's approach to reducing alienation. The agency, however is also concerned with the isolation and loneliness that many inner-city elderly experience. While living in the inner-city affords a great deal of independence and privacy, a feeling of isolation can occur since so many people tend to keep to themselves, which results in feeling somewhat invisible. For many people who feel this way, the drop-in is a place where they can be less invisible "It doesn't matter what day I come...or even if I'm gone for a while, when I walk in here, there's somebody always knows me, Hey Joe, how's it going?." (Field notes: Joe, Oct., 1989). Pictures of members, playing pool, drinking coffee or sitting and talking adorn the walls of the drop-in centre. Many times, someone would point their picture out to me, "That's me there, playing the guitar" or "That's me and Helen helping out at last year's garage sale." Even the membership files (cards kept on a rollodex in the office) are personalized with a photograph of each person pasted in the upper corner of each card. Several of the seniors who come to the drop-in appreciate the personal touch and said that they liked the way the staff treated them as individuals, rather than file numbers or social work cases. One man said "The thing I like most about this place is that they know your name and they care about what happens to you" (Field notes: Harry, July, 1989). Another man explained how the staff at Operation Friendship were different from other helping agencies,

> At Operation Friendship, they care about your feelings...once a social worker from another place came to see me. She asked me twelve pages of questions. It took almost two hours, and, you know, she never once asked me how I was feeling. She didn't care; it was just a job to her (Field notes: Henry, November,1989).

In a similar vein, a woman who is a senior and member of Operation Friendship and who has had extensive involvement with social workers told me that "Social workers put labels on you. They just can't deal with you unless you have a label. I don't blame them for that. It's the system, but here (at Operation Friendship) labels...they just aren't what's important" (Field notes: Anna, June, 1989). Clearly the executive and staff of Operation Friendship are consciously concerned with avoiding the bureaucratic or professionalized approach to helping, since they know that this form of helping is likely the least helpful, particularly within the context of the inner-city. One worker attributes the popularity of their centre to the fact that the staff rarely act like traditional social workers. "Most of the seniors don't like or trust social workers, because they tend to intervene in their lifes and take their power away, they are more trusting of us. They trust us not to take their power away from them and we respect that" (Fieldnotes: O.F. staff, May, 1989).

6.7 Staff As Family: Meeting The Elderly's Need For Intimacy

While chapter three explored some of the boundaries and divisions among inner-city elderly, it is important to state that some of the more intimate friendships observed were found between staff members or volunteers and seniors. Most of the seniors do maintain considerable distance among themselves, preferring instead to become friends with staff members or volunteers or to adopt them as pseudo family members. Perhaps initiating and maintaining relationships with staff is one way that the seniors can elevate themselves above their peers, by viewing themselves as being on the same level as the staff. Obviously the inner-city elderly also can trust the staff to keep their secrets and not to exploit them, two major concerns that they have regarding relationships with one another. There was often more personal information shared among the elderly and staff or volunteers than among peers, and the tendency to show a front seemed less prevalent in relationships between seniors and staff.

6.8 Operation Friendship And The Un-Management Of Leisure

In keeping with the literature reviewed in chapter two regarding service approaches, some comment is called for regarding the management of leisure in various service organizations. Although there is relatively little data available that relates directly to leisure and recreation, it is fairly obvious, that the structure and type of recreation offered by an agency will to a great degree be influenced by the overall service approach of that organization. A brief discussion of the three service approaches, charity, professionalism and self-help, and their philosophies and styles of management of leisure will be re-introduced.

In the charity approach, as outlined in the literature review, the main driving force is the promotion of certain desirable values and behaviours among the people being helped. In an organization which adheres to the charity approach, recreation and leisure would not only be offered as rewards for good behaviour but would also be used as the vehicle by which certain values or traits would be instilled in the clientele. There would be relatively little room for individual choice and expression in leisure. The professional approach, which is dominated by a clinical rehabilitative focus, would also take a highly interventionist focus in the recreational pursuits of its clientele. Recreational activity would be seen mainly for its rehabilitative strengths and would tend to be directed by the professional with little input from the clients. Professionalization of the leisure field itself has certainly led to an increase in the involvement of both public and private sectors in the production and management of a phenomenon that at one time was uniquely personal and individualistic. However, currently in the field of recreation therapy, there has been a strong move by therapists to engage in a more client-centered approach, essentially to avoid the paternalistic stance of 'the professional knows best' and to empower individuals who are seeking help. As a contrast to the charity and professional approach, in the self-help approach leisure is not managed, mass-produced or structured. Leisure is basically left for individuals to define and to subsequently pursue their own ways, although opportunities or resources for leisure may be made available. In addition, the self-help approach, due to its sensitivity to the desires of the individuals, recognizes that one's cultural and lifestyle background affects one's leisure and therefore does not believe it to be advantageous to advocate certain forms of leisure over others.

Where does Operation Friendship fit in this discussion? It is evident from the material presented thus far in this chapter that the agency adheres to the self-help orientation, but what does that mean for leisure? Essentially it means that Operation Friendship does not seek to institutionalize or structure the leisure experiences of its members. In a sense, leisure is purposely left un-managed by Operation Friendship. The leisure activities that do take place at the centre tend to emerge from the members as an extension of previous leisure interests, such as card playing, rather than being initiated and formally planned or scheduled by the staff. In fact, as pointed out in chapter five, formally scheduled events or outings are generally not well-supported or attended.

Operation Friendship does not manage the leisure experiences of their members. One of the strongest reasons for this is that most of the inner-city elderly, due to their previous lifestyles and current economic resources, have never relied on formal institutions to meet their leisure needs. Unlike middle-class seniors who flock to centres like the Society For The Retired and Semi-retired, where pottery classes and bus trips are plentiful, inner-city elderly find the concept of signing up for leisure to be a foreign one and also one which holds little appeal, even if they could afford to participate.

> Even if I could afford one of those senior bus trips to Banff, I wouldn't go with them because then you've always got to do what they (the tour organizers) want you to do, stop at the places they think you should stop at. Me, I'd just like to walk into the bush a ways, sit by a stream and think. That's what I'd do, if I could go on a trip to the mountains (Fieldnotes:John, August,1989).

The opportunities for leisure that are available from Operation Friendship are perhaps less extravagant than those offered by seniors' agencies in other parts of the city, card playing, billiards and visiting over coffee. But what is most important is that the opportunities for leisure at Operation Friendship fit the personal, social and economic resources and backgrounds of its members, as well as make sense to them. As was pointed out in chapter five, the members of Operation Friendship, similar to other seniors, play bingo, yet when they play it is not only for meeting their leisure or social needs, but also for meeting their basic survival needs. Viewed in this light, it wouldn't make sense for Operation Friendship to sponsor a bus tour when some of their seniors are in fact homeless and searching for a roof over their heads.

6.9 Comment

Operation Friendship has consciously chosen to align itself with both the self-help and radical social work service approaches. This commitment is evident in nearly everything they do, from their needs assessment study to their relentless involvement in social issues. While this philosophy has essentially always been the backbone of the agency, the previous section has served to highlight some of the challenges encountered when attempting to work within this framework. Perhaps one of the main reasons why Operation Friendship strives to avoid the bureaucratic or professionalized helping approach is that this type of service tends to set up criteria and restrictions for service which often become obstacles to people seeking help.

Operation Friendship continually strives in their efforts to be truly responsive to their clients needs as well as to the broader social forces that affect the seniors' resources and abilities to have a decent life. For example, the agency recognizes that the loss of status and the absence of intimacy in the lives of the seniors they deal with are profound issues. Through the offering of volunteer roles and meaningful friendships, Operation Friendship tries to do what it can to reduce the apathy and alienation which is so strongly felt by many inner-city elderly.

While opportunities for middle-class elderly have traditionally been provided within a highly structured and organized framework, this orientation holds little value for older adults who live in the inner city. To conceive of leisure as something which needs to be consciously planned, organized and implemented by public agencies is not only a middle-class view, but one which is generally not well received by the people who visit Operation Friendship's drop-in centre. By refusing to 'manage' the leisure interests of the elderly who live in the inner-city, the staff who work at Operation Friendship demonstrate that they respect the individuals they work with, and care enough about them to want to provide the kind of services that they need.

As a testament to their service approach and to the value and important role that Operation Friendship plays in the lives of the inner-city elderly, the words of one of their volunteer cooks speaks volumes. I was sitting having coffee with Sam, who had just spent the better part of the morning preparing stew for that evening's meal, and I asked him if he would tell me about his life. He sat and pondered my question for about three seconds, then without any hesitation, he waved his arm towards the stew that was simmering on the stove and he said "This place...the drop-in...is my life" (Fieldnotes: Sam, August, 1989). At that moment, and indeed on several occasions after that, it became startlingly clear to me how important the drop-in was for many inner-city elderly. Several times during my fieldwork, I found myself asking the question: "Where would these seniors be without the drop-in; who would be there for them, to clothe them, feed them, help them find shelter, access to services they are entitled to; and, most importantly, who else in the inner-city would even come close to giving them the opportunities to re-gain their self-respect or dignity that Operation Friendship does. Unfortunately, with our society's institutions structured the way they are today, the answer is "Nobody."

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

7. NOT ALL STORIES HAVE HAPPY ENDINGS

Most of the stories in this thesis told in this thesis do not have happy endings, but perhaps this provides strong justification for the point raised in chapter two, that aging is a complex social process influenced by many factors and systemic forces. Retirement for individuals with inadequate financial resources, limited social roles and few social opportunities is anything but a simple or easy transition or process. Many books and articles have suggested that retirement is a process of adjustment. What they fail to acknowledge is that certain individuals, by nature of their resources and experiences, will be better prepared than others to deal with or cope with their retirement. The stories woven throughout this thesis attest to the fact that the experience of retirement for inner-city elderly is one that is complex and influenced not only by their pasts but their current situations as well.

I am painfully aware that this thesis does not exactly make for pleasant or light reading. Several issues have been raised regarding the process of aging among individuals with meagre financial, social and health resources. The most significant point which these issues raise is what they produce - feelings of apathy and alienation among elderly people who live in the inner-city. Solutions to such complex and broad social problems will not come easily. Improvements cannot be made without significantly restructuring traditional attitudes towards the inner-city and the people who live there and increasing the involvement of these individuals in the development of policies and services which address their needs and work to change the bigger picture. This thesis attempts to tell the stories of inner-city elderly. It is hoped that the stories told, while they may not have happy endings, will serve as written testament of the struggles and concerns of a group of individuals who des-perately need to be listened to and understood by policy makers and those working in the human services field. As such it is meant to begin to fill the large gap that exists in our knowledge of the complexity of aging and service provision issues.

The primary aim of this project was to illuminate the lives of a group of seniors that we know little about. To be a window to a world rarely represented in academic research. It is hoped that this study will serve to raise awareness of inner-city elderly, their needs and concerns. While this thesis is a collection of personal stories in keeping with the tradition of critical sociology it is also meant to be a vehicle for action to improve conditions for inner-city elderly.

One of the strongest threads which connects all of the themes in this thesis is the desire of inner-city elderly to maintain their independence. Due to the harsh environment in which they live, self-reliance is both a valued and necessary trait for inner-city elderly to maintain. At the same time, the forces in the inner-city which make it necessary for the elderly to protect their own interests also lead to alienation and isolation. Living in buildings with neighbours they cannot trust, walking down streets that are not safe and trying to get their needs met through bureaucratic systems tend to result in feelings of hostility, resignation and apathy.

While Operation Friendship has made great strides in promoting and developing their self-help service orientation, they continually face obstacles in their efforts. Perhaps the greatest obstacle they face is the apathy of their clients. It is important to view this condition as part of the larger social condition. Inner-city elderly are not apathetic because they want to be, but rather because it is the only survival mechanism available to them. Many inner-city elderly have learnt that efforts to change the situation are useless and have thus accepted the conditions of the neighbourhood in which they live. The provision of a safe place for elderly to gather, volunteer roles in which self-esteem may be restored and people to listen non-judgementally to their concerns, may seem like small measures. But in reality, these steps, in the long run, may be the most powerful ones for counteracting the alienation and isolation that so many inner-city elderly experience. As such, efforts like those of Operation Friendship must be encouraged and used as role models for other agencies who are in the helping profession.

This thesis concentrated mainly on the experiences and stories of elderly males that live in the inner-city. As it was pointed out in the introduction, elderly males comprise the bulk of the inner-city elderly population and therefore were more easily reached at the drop-in centre. A similar study which would document the experiences and concerns of elderly women, perhaps focusing on the case study approach, since the numbers are smaller, is greatly needed. A perusal of existing research literature on the inner-city also provides support for this need.

An important point must be made regarding future generations of older adults: currently in the inner-city, the proportion of residents are single males. Many, like the respondents of this study are blue- collar workers who work out of town and in seasonal jobs. Thought and action need to be taken now, so that the current generation of blue collar workers fares better than the previous one. Advocacy work which lobbies for such things as portable pension plans, improved occupational safety standards and family accommodations at the work site are but a few examples of ways to avoid producing a future group of retirees facing similar problems and injustices as the elderly of today. Also needed is some form of longitudinal/action study which will trace today's blue collar workers, document their experiences and make them known to industry and government.

On a more personal level, to say that this thesis was an academic pursuit is not entirely accurate. Although I initially embarked on the project to fulfill the requirements of a Master's degree, I became increasingly concerned about the social conditions and issues that face inner-city elderly. Conducting this project enabled me to confront poverty (something I knew nothing about) and seek to understand it as a condition that affects everyone, not just the poor. I also came to know, admire and respect several individuals whose willingness to share their stories with me contributed not only to the development of this thesis, but to my own personal development as well.

While I did learn about some of the issues that face inner-city elderly and how services can be adapted and improved for this population (which were things that I thought I wanted to learn), the most significant thing I learnt was the power of the qualitative research method. However, I did not reach this conclusion without some conflict. Originally I felt proud of my qualitative research project of inner-city elderly, since, after all, it was to be their point of view. About half way through writing my thesis, I began to question the effectiveness of telling their stories. I began to think that I had romanticized or idealized this approach, I found myself wondering whether telling their stories was really enough? This doubt was finally cast aside after I spent a few days reading over the first draft of my thesis, from beginning to end. Doing this reaffirmed my original belief that telling the stories of inner-city elderly was not only a valuable process, but perhaps the most effective way to help them.

Many other qualitative research projects have suggested that talking about one's past and current situation (although often painful) can be therapeutic in that it allows individuals to sort out their feelings and express important concerns. "All people have at least one important story to tell - their own, and they want to share it with others" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975:101). Telling one's story can be a way of both ventilating and validating one's experiences and feelings. To be able to say, "Listen, this is what I went through, or this is what happened to me and here is how I feel about that" can be very rewarding for people who have never been given the opportunity to express their opinions or their side of the story. This point is extremely valuable in the context of inner-city elderly, since research, policy development and service development to date have failed to fully address the concerns of inner-city elderly, mainly because their voices have rarely been heard or solicited.

Sometimes it was difficult to listen their stories because they held such tragedy and sadness. For example, many of the men I spoke with came from families in which alcohol played a dominant role:

> My old man used to make his own whiskey, see...that's how I know so much about wine making, I can make wine from just about anything...fruit is the best. Lately I've taken to making my wine from bran, cheaper and damn powerful stuff too! We had a cast iron pot in the kitchen, which was for the old man's whiskey, he always had a cup or two in the mornings. Well one morning, see, I helped myself to a cup, and off I went to school, I was higher than a kite by lunch time, they sent me home to sleep it off. I was eight or nine years old...I'm fifty one now and been drinking ever since (Field notes: Charlie, July, 1989).

Stories of neglect and abuse as children were also common,

> I used to look after my little brother, maybe I was seven or eight and we didn't have much to eat either, stale bread if we were lucky. My mother used to come home with strange men all the time...I asked her once if one of them was my father...she slapped me good and hard. I never understood then. (Field notes: George, Sept., 1989).

Of course, the past is not always fondly remembered. Some of the personal histories that I heard were accompanied by feelings of regret, sadness and loneliness. While visiting Henry one afternoon, I commented on how handsome he looked in a picture that was sitting on top of his bureau. He looked rather longingly at the picture for a moment and then he said:

> That was me when I was twenty five... The reason I looked so handsome was that I was in love at the time the picture was taken. But...my sweetheart died from TB. Guess you could say that I've been lonely ever since. I often think how my life might have been different if she hadn't died...one thing I know for sure...I wouldn't be a drunk like I am now. (Field notes: Henry, August, 1989).

Another man, describing a particularly lonely time in his life (when he separated from his wife) said with tears in his eyes, "There's no point in telling you anymore of my story...it's too late to put it right now" (Field notes: Dick, Sept., 1989). It was at times like this that I was careful to respect the wishes of individuals as to what they did or did not want to talk about. In qualitative research, ethics means that researchers must define their responsibilities to other human beings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:49). "Ethical questions do not reside narrowly in the realm of how to behave in the field, rather they need to be understood in terms of researchers' lifelong obligations to the people who have touched their lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:57). Not only would it have been rude to pry into their pasts; it would also have been unethical. Therefore whenever an individual chose to tell me something about their past, I was grateful and tried to listen as supportively as I could, understanding that the past was often difficult to talk about.

In the final analysis, what ended up being most important to me was the opportunity to conduct naturalistic research - to observe the everyday life and experiences of inner-city elderly. The mere fact that people who live in the inner-city were willing to tell me their stories meant a lot to me. The personal experiences gained, friendships made and the memories of the people I met will stay with me much longer (and mean more to me) than the actual written document. Such personal comments may seem out of place in an academic paper. Certainly the academic texts on qualitative research, which I consulted for guidelines, fail to address the personal aspect of the research process. In a postcript to her story about life in the inner-city, Stephens (1976) states that many researchers, having done similar studies, neglect to include any mention of their own personal feelings or experiences in their final product. "Perhaps fieldworkers are often changed by their research experience, perhaps even usually this is the case. I don't know. The literature on field work experiences is frustratingly coy about this issue" Stephens, 1976:98). Since it is not possible to engage in an ethnographic study and not be personally affected by it, it would appear that neglecting personal comments about the experience would be doing a dis-service to both the ethnographic tradition and to the individuals who made it come alive.

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